



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

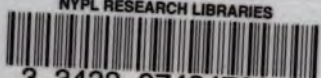
We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



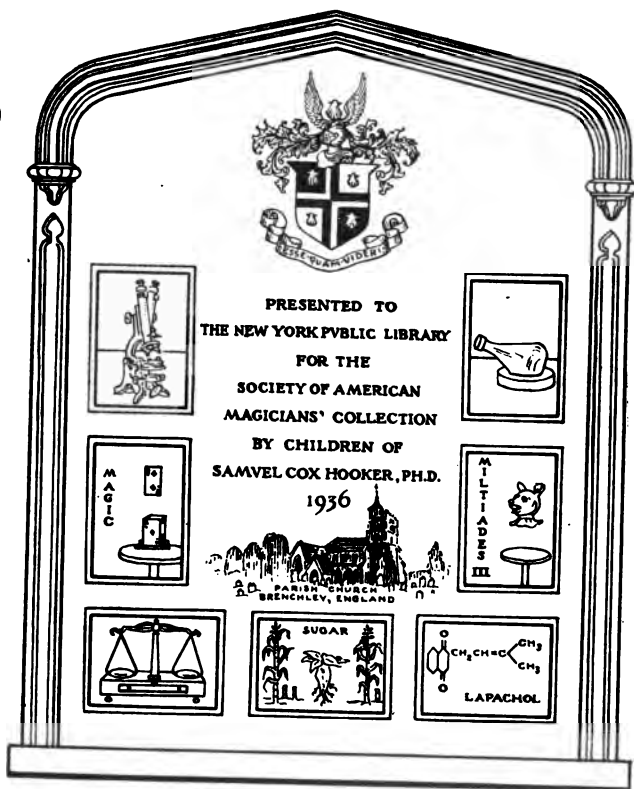
3 3433 07484789 2

THE HOUSE OF - THE SPHINX -



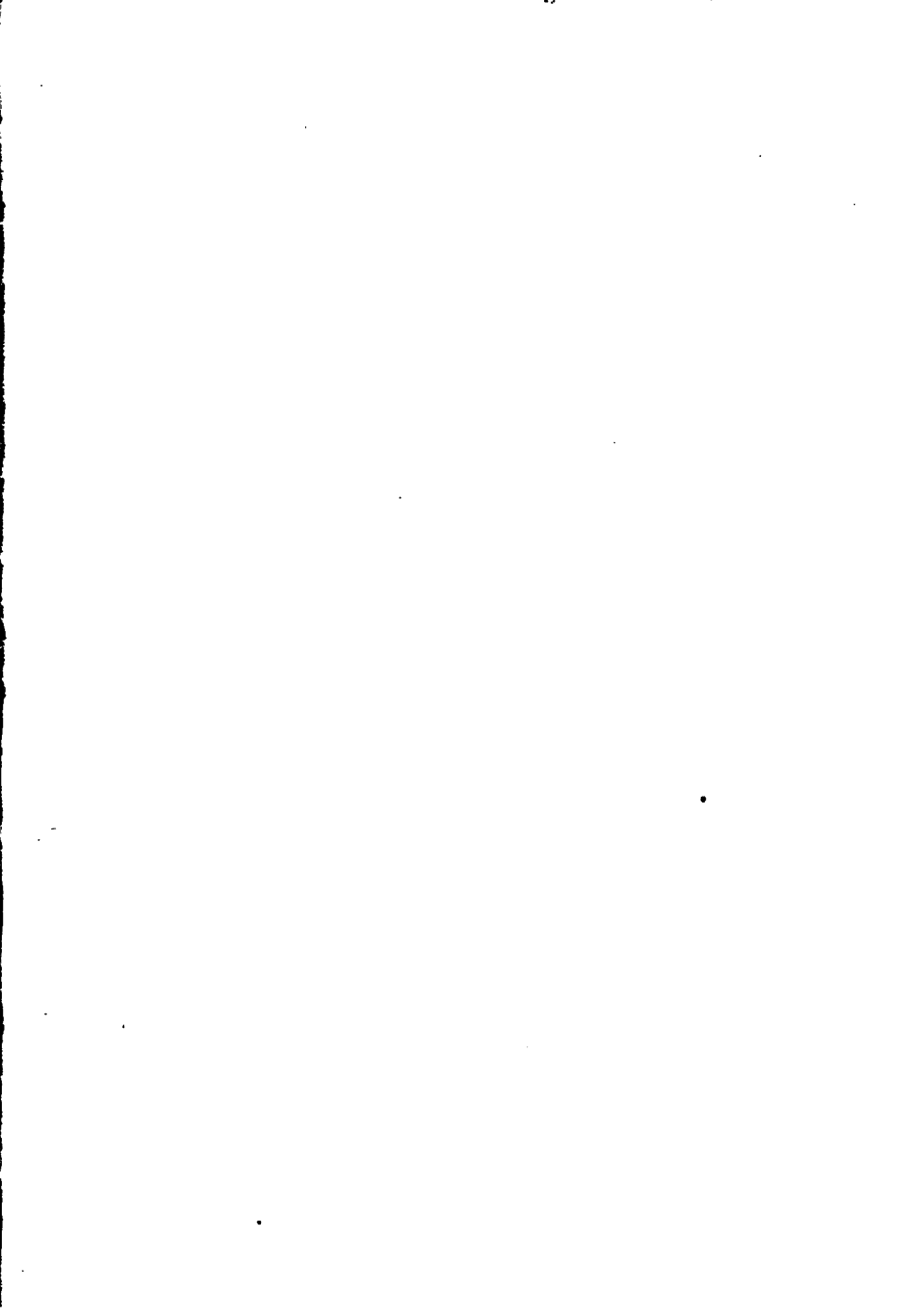
HENRY RIDGELY EVANS

1. Fiction, American



NBO

Evans





THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX



Adrian Plata

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

A NOVEL

BY

HENRY RIDGELY EVANS

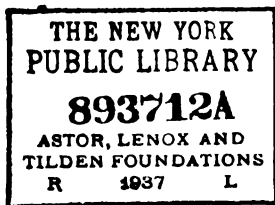
AUTHOR OF "THE SPIRIT WORLD UNMASKED," "THE OLD
AND THE NEW MAGIC," ETC.

NEW YORK
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON
THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY

1907

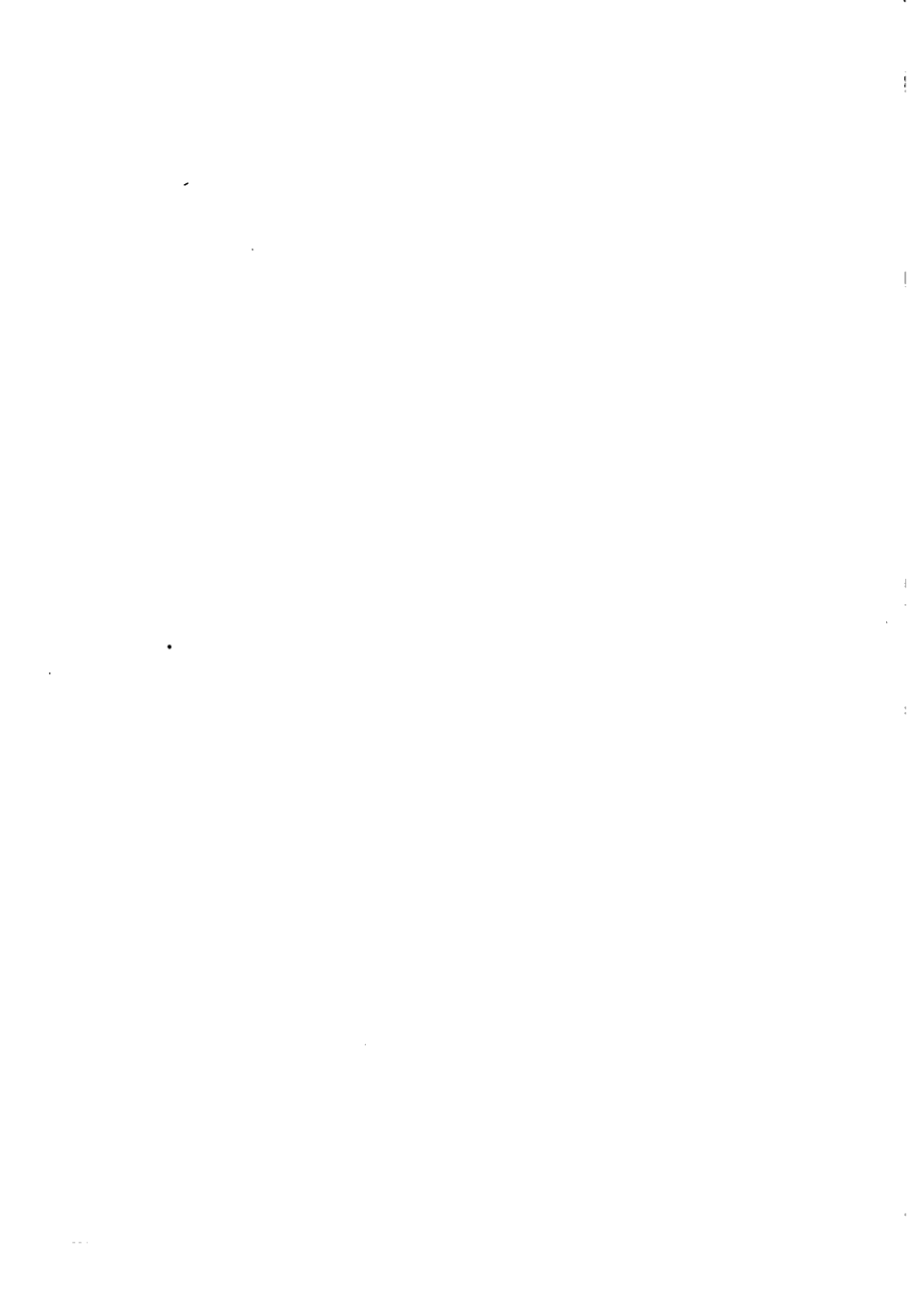
M. 5m



COPYRIGHT, 1907, BY
THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY

NOV 1937
CLUB
YASBY

To
my friends
HARRY KELLAR,
the dean of American magicians,
and
HOWARD THURSTON,
the eminent young illusionist,
I dedicate this novel of magic and mystery,
because of their uncompromising battle
against charlatanism.



CONTENTS

BOOK	PAGE
I. IN WHICH THE SPHINX SLUMBERS .	13
II. IN WHICH THE SPHINX IS AROUSED .	85
III. IN WHICH THE RIDDLE OF THE SPHINX IS SOLVED	141
IV. IN WHICH THE SPHINX SLEEPS FOR- EVER	195

INTRODUCTION

A STORY of true love needs no formal introduction, just as good wine needs no bush. My only excuse for a preface is the fact that this particular romance deals more or less with the occult sciences, and it may interest the reader to know something about the history of magic and the influence it has exerted in the world. In an age of science it seems strange that magic, astrology, alchemy, spiritism, and kindred things, should have any votaries among serious-minded people.

But nevertheless such is the case. The literature on the subject is quite voluminous. The reason for all this is obvious. It is a reaction against the materialism of the age. Tender-hearted people flee from the mechanical conception of the universe and the soul to the wildest dreams of the Orient. But of late years the materialistic school of philosophy has been on the wane among thinking men. The inadequacy of atheistic-monism to really explain anything has been

patent for a long time. That the cosmos is a psychism is gradually dawning upon many who have held the materialistic conception of things. The epoch-making book of Sir Oliver Lodge (than whom no profounder physicist exists) on mind and its relations to matter shows the change of base on the part of scientific men toward the idealistic philosophy. The universe is the product of mind. The Orient has always advocated the spiritualistic interpretation of the cosmos and the human soul. Exalting mind above matter to an extravagant degree, the philosophy of the Orient has brought into being the occult sciences which have exercised such a potent sway over humanity. The power of the will, as exhibited in hypnotic experiments; the well-credited examples of telepathy, or thought-transference; the remarkable experiments in clairvoyance, etc., which are well attested, go to prove that the human soul is an entity possessing wonderful—ay, magical—powers, and capable of surviving the shock of time and the grave. The Societies for Psychical Research—English, American, and French—which conduct their experiments along scientific lines, have verified many of

the so-called occult arts of the Orient. Science to-day, as witness the experiments in chemistry of Professor Ramsay, seems to be on the verge of realizing the mad dreams of the old alchemists. All these things being so, it is not a remarkable fact that attention should be drawn to the occult arts of the East, and that charlatans should flourish—pretenders to magic, who live by preying upon the superstitions of the vulgar.

In the House of the Sphinx the Author has endeavored to depict one of these pretenders to sorcery. The hermetic séances of Ramidan are not drawn from the imagination. The curious reader will find such occult practices seriously treated in Eliphas Levi's work on higher magic, which has been translated into English by A. E. Waite, under the title of the "Mysteries of Magic." Levi was a great French cabalist and mystic, whose life reads like a romance.

Magic probably originated in India, and from there filtered into Egypt, Persia, and other countries. The temples of Egypt were veritable storehouses of natural magic. The science of the ancient world was largely confined to the Priests of Egypt. With the aid

of polished convex mirrors of metal they were able to cast images upon the smoke rising from burning incense, and thus often deceived their votaries into the belief that they beheld visions of the gods. Hypnotism was known to them, and practiced. Magic was prohibited by the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, yet it flourished. Albertus Magnus and Cornelius Agrippa were the shining lights among these necromancers.

In the eighteenth century the famous charlatan, Cagliostro, endeavored to foist the occult arts of the East upon Freemasonry. His success was only temporary. He failed to impress the hard-headed, skeptical English with his pretensions. Among his paraphernalia was a magic mirror, in which he claimed clairvoyant persons were able to see visions of events transpiring at a distance. In the House of the Sphinx, Ramidan uses a similar mirror. Science has studied these mirrors, and come to the conclusion that there is nothing occult about them; they simply enable the experimenter to concentrate his attention and bring about a state of auto-hypnosis. The visions float into the mind

INTRODUCTION

II

from the subliminal consciousness. In an article contributed to the "New Age," I have treated at length of this subject. In modern parlance it is known as "crystal gazing," and is very popular among delvers into the mysteries of magic. The use of the magic mirror is very ancient. It was known to the Egyptians. With this brief review of the history of magic, the curtain rises on the House of the Sphinx.



BOOK I
IN WHICH THE SPHINX
SLUMBERS

" The Sphinx is drowsy, its wings are furled."

—EMERSON.

CHAPTER I

BETWEEN the paws of the giant Sphinx of Gizeh is a small temple, known to tourists as the House of the Sphinx. For immemorial years it lay buried beneath the shifting sand of the Egyptian desert. No one suspected its existence. The couchant Sphinx, with its unfathomable eyes and its mysterious smile, jealously guarded the sacred treasure, fearing neither Persian, Grecian, Roman, Moslem, nor French invader. Finally there came into the land of the Pharaohs the indomitable Anglo-Saxon. The sand was cleared away, and the temple was revealed to the wondering gaze of Arabian fellah and European archeologist. It was then that the riddle of the Sphinx was solved, its meaning made manifest to the world. And so with the House that lay upon the English moors, the veritable House of the Sphinx, involved in the clutch of a monster, malevolent, mysterious, Egyptian!

This is the story of how I discovered the mansion of the Sphinx, and read its dark

16 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

riddle; of how I became involved in the meshes of one of the most extraordinary adventures that ever befell man in this our mortal life. Seated by an American fireside, my dear wife and children around me, I still look back upon the scenes through which I passed with fear and trembling. The twilight gathers in the room, the flames leap up the chimney from the crackling logs, casting fantastic figures upon floor and walls. In these trembling, formless shadows I seem to see the face of one long dead—a monstrous visage, evil and malignant, that of the Sphinx. Then the vision fades; I awake from my hideous dream. Let me recall all the circumstances, setting down naught in malice, doing full justice to the actors in the remarkable drama.

In the summer of 18— I was in London; young, possessed of a comfortable income, a bachelor, reasonably good-looking, and an American. I was indeed fortunate. I had graduated at the Troy Polytechnic School, taken a post-graduate course in chemistry at Heidelberg, attended the lectures of X. and Z. at Paris, and was *en route* for the States, as John Bull terms our progressive country, where I expected to take charge of my father's great chemical works at C., Massachu-

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 17

setts. I was in London on pleasure, and stopping at Morley's, Trafalgar Square. One morning I saw the following advertisement tucked snugly away into an obscure corner of that mastodon of newspapers, the *Times*:

WANTED—The services of a young gentleman well versed in chemistry and physics to assist in certain experiments of an unusual nature. Write to J. Moberley, Esq., Wyndwood Hall, Sussex. Salary £60 per annum.

Sixty pounds per annum! It was not much, but then money was no object to me at that period of my life. I wish I could say the same now. I was young, adventurous, and anxious to see something of English country life, about which I had read so much in popular novels. The name, Wyndwood Hall, had withal something of a mysterious sound about it; besides, I was piqued to discover what the sundry *experiments of an unusual nature* might be. I immediately sat down and answered the advertisement. In a day or two I received an answer in a graceful, feminine hand, directing me to call upon Mr. Moberley's lawyer, Gray's Inn Court. Mr. Oldfield was a benevolent but shrewd-looking gentleman of the old school, and he treated me courteously. My credentials proved satis-

18 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

factory—more than satisfactory, for the old barrister and I were soon on the best of terms.

“Very good, very good indeed, Mr. Travers,” said Mr. Oldfield, looking at me over his spectacles. “You and Mr. Moberley will no doubt get along famously. But he is eccentric, sir; very, very eccentric, and you will have to study his moods. I am more frank with you, sir, than with most people on first acquaintance. But I like your manner, sir, your looks, and—but enough said.”

Here he took a pinch of snuff from a richly chased silver box, and offered me the same, which I courteously declined.

“Don’t take snuff? Oh, very good; very good. We fogies of the old school cannot give up ancient customs, you see. When will you be ready to start for Wyndwood Hall?”

“To-morrow,” I replied.

“That’s right. The sooner the better. I will drop a line, telling them you are coming. You will find Moberley a kind and hospitable employer. I knew him at Eton and Oxford—we were chums; kept up our acquaintance for years after. But of late we have not seen each other—I do not like——”

Here he paused, eyed me strangely, and

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 19

turned away to fumble with some papers on his desk.

"How large a family is there at Wyndwood Hall?" I asked.

"Family, ah—— Let me see! There is Miss Isidaura Moberley, mistress of Wyndwood Manor, and Colonel Moberley, her uncle. Living in the old hall are Jennings, the butler; Mrs. Brandon, the housekeeper; several under-domestics, and—well, never mind; you'll meet them soon enough." There was a slight tinge of scorn in the lawyer's voice as he dwelt on the evidently obnoxious *them*.

"What are the experiments in chemistry, etc., which Colonel Moberley is carrying on?" I next inquired.

"Bosh! Ahem!" Here he coughed to hide his exclamation. "Really, I know little or nothing about them. Transcendental physics, I suppose. Now, good-by, Mr. Travers—sorry not to see more of you; but important engagements."

I bade the kind old lawyer good-by and turned my footsteps in the direction of my hostelry, meditating on my trip to Sussex and upon the mysterious *them* whose acquaintance I would make ere another day passed. The

20 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

following afternoon saw me at St. Pancras Station, bag and baggage.

On the way down to Wyndwood Hall I passed the time building air-castles, in which chemical laboratories and ladies' boudoirs were strangely mixed.

"What species of eccentric is this old Colonel Moberley?" I asked myself. "And what kind of experiments is he carrying on?"

My reveries were finally interrupted by the arrival of the train at a little country station called Stillwater, which was my destination. I was the only passenger to alight. There was no one there to meet me, so I looked up the station-master and inquired the way to the Hall, after having left my heavy luggage, containing clothes, books, and some chemical apparatus, in the charge of a porter to be sent up later. With a small satchel in hand I started off for the Hall. The scenery about Stillwater Village was wild and picturesque. In the distance were long stretches of moorland, and beyond that the sea. Wyndwood Hall stood upon an eminence and was surrounded by ancient trees. It was a great, rambling old house, with diamond-paned windows, scores of twisted chimneys, and a clock tower; but everything looked ruinous and

crumbling. Over the lodge gate was a large bronze Sphinx, in recumbent attitude, drowsily brooding upon the landscape.

Involuntarily I exclaimed: "The House of the Sphinx!"

I rang the bell several times, but there came no response. Discovering that the porter's lodge was untenanted, I pushed open the ponderous iron gate and entered the park. A winding avenue of gnarled oak trees led up to the arched portal of the mansion. "A strange welcome to Wyndwood Hall," I thought, as I lifted the knocker of the front door and rapped loudly. A tottering, gray-headed old domestic, who proved to be the butler, Jennings, let me in, after I had cooled my heels impatiently for at least ten minutes on the flagged steps.

"Who shall I say, sir?" he asked.

"Mr. Travers, the chemist from London," I replied.

"Yes, sir; walk right into the drawing-room, and I will tell Mistress you are come. Give me your bag, sir."

I handed him my traveling satchel, and was ushered into the long drawing-room of the Hall, ever memorable to me from that evening to the present day.

CHAPTER II

TWILIGHT had fallen upon Wyndwood Hall when I entered the long drawing-room. My footsteps were so deadened by the heavy carpeting that the man who was seated at the grand piano did not hear me come into the apartment. If he did, he seemed utterly indifferent to my presence. I sat down in a luxurious armchair and watched him. A tall green-shaded lamp near him threw a mellow light over the ivory keys of the piano. In the polished ebony lid, which was raised, the better to emit the sound, I could see the reflection of the long white fingers of the performer. Just back of the instrument was an exotic plant—a great, feathery thing growing in an earthen jar.

The musician was evidently improvising, first upon one theme, then on another. His efforts showed him to be a master-hand at piano-pyrotechnics, and all the subtleties of counterpoint and fugue. Now the music was

soft and dreamy, and I sat back in my chair and felt like a lotus-eater swooning with languorous delight. Now it changed to a martial air: I could see in imagination clouds of mail-clad horsemen on the march; the earth shook with the thunder of the charge; I could hear the blare of trumpets and the clash of steel. I felt like a cuirassier of Napoleon's guard charging an infantry square. Again the music changed to a weird, incomprehensible melody, such as one might hear in the wilds of India. The green light of the lamp fell upon the player and the Eastern plant, and seemed to metamorphose them completely, he into some hideous, outlandish animal, crouching amid the dense, rank grass of a jungle, and the exotic plant into a waving tree exhaling a delicious but deadly perfume. I sat for some time in the drawing-room listening to the music, when the butler suddenly announced Miss Moberley, whereupon a graceful figure clothed in a well-fitting riding-habit appeared in the doorway. By her side lumbered a huge English mastiff, a most formidable-looking brute. She held the animal in check by grasping his ponderous, brass-studded collar. I arose to meet the lady. In the meanwhile the butler had placed a large

24 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

silver candelabrum containing wax tapers upon the mantelpiece. By the light thus afforded I was enabled to study Miss Moberley's features. Her eyes were of the deepest violet, fringed by the longest and most beautiful lashes that I have ever seen. Her eyebrows were exquisitely arched. Her oval, flower-like face was surrounded by a nimbus of golden hair. It was a Madonna-like visage, such as one sees depicted upon the ikons of Byzantine cathedrals.

"Mr. Travers," she exclaimed in a low, musical voice that was most pleasing to my ears, "I am glad you have come."

She held out her hand to me. The noble-looking dog, taking advantage of his release, bounded into the room.

There is everything in a first handclasp. I took Miss Moberley's hand and felt instinctively that the barriers of restraint were down between us, and that we were friends. I thanked her for her kind welcome.

"I must humbly apologize," she said, a shade of annoyance upon her fair face, "for not having a trap at the station to bring you to the Hall. It was not my fault. I gave orders to the coachman to meet you at the station, but for some reason or other he has failed to do so. He is an old and rheumatic

man, full of whims and eccentricities, and occasionally takes no orders but his own. But old family servants are privileged characters, Mr. Travers."

I begged her to forget the occurrence, and assured her that I had enjoyed my walk to the Hall.

We exchanged a few commonplaces, when our attention was attracted by the sudden furious barking of the dog. I turned, and saw that the animal's rage was aroused by the sight of the musician, who had stopped playing and was looking in my direction.

"Cæsar, come here! How dare you!" cried Miss Moberley, with an emphatic stamp of her little foot. Her rosy lips were tightly compressed; her brow was clouded.

The man at the piano slowly rose, and fixed his lurid eyes intently upon the infuriated brute. The mastiff cowered down, completely subdued; his loud barking subsided into a sepulchral growl. With his tail between his legs he retreated toward his mistress, as if for protection—an extraordinary act, when we take into consideration the great strength and the bold and fearless nature of the mastiff breed.

"Right about face, march!" cried Miss Moberley, lightly touching the dog's tawny

26 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

back with the tip of her riding whip. The animal needed no further command, but slunk out of the room at once, still growling. I was very much impressed by the scene, and wondered at the strange power the man had exerted over the dog.

"Mr. Travers," said Miss Moberley, "let me present you to M. Ramidan."

He came forward, as she spoke, and shook hands cordially with me. It was the first and the last greeting of the kind between us. His hand was cold and clammy and sent an icy chill to my heart. There was a smile upon his bloodless lips; his brow was serene, yet something in the innermost depths of my being told me that he was inimical to me. Science teaches us that atoms repel and attract each other. What is that strange force with which the atom is imbued that manifests itself in repulsion or attraction? We know not. In the higher range of organized matter—the human being—this same attraction and repulsion takes place between people. We call the force psychic force, for want of a subtler term. Theosophists who write learnedly of the human aura, brain waves, and the like, profess to have unraveled the mystery.

"My uncle," said Miss Moberley, after a slight pause, "is confined to his bedroom with an obstinate attack of gout. I will introduce you to him to-morrow. I will now leave you gentlemen to keep each other company until dinner-time." So saying, she bowed slightly, and left the room. I could hear her down the long hall humming some gay little French refrain.

"Let us adjourn to the library where we can smoke and be at our ease," said M. Ramadan. I assented, and he led the way across the room, opened a small, green baize covered door, and we were in the place. It was a small room. The four walls were lined with books, many of them being parchment-bound, iron-clasped folios of great age. There was a musty aroma about the apartment that would have delighted the olfactory sense of a bibliophile. The volumes seemed to say, "We are old!" Upon a small table in the center of the room was an antique lamp, and by the lamp was a woman's riding glove, carelessly thrown down. I said to myself: "Miss Moberley, then, is something of a bookworm; for she frequents this dusty mausoleum of embalmed thought."

28 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

M. Ramadan interrupted my musings by handing me a box of cigars. I took one of the weeds and lighted it.

"I cannot get accustomed to Western habits, as yet, and find cigars too much for me," he said, "so I stick to the cigarette. There is a flavor about Turkish tobacco that is very pleasant to me."

He dexterously rolled a cigarette between his long fingers, and while he was so engaged I had a chance to study him. He was a tall, thin man, with broad, square shoulders, "suggestive of a suit of clothes hung upon an iron cross." His hair was long and dark, a trifle streaked with gray. He had a lion-like way of tossing this unkempt mane which was quite impressive at times. His face was cadaverous looking, with a waxy pallor about it that reminded me of a corpse, especially by candle light. It was smoothly shaven. His eyebrows were shaggy and beetling. The lips were thin; the teeth large, glittering, and sharp; eyes of a slightly opalescent hue, restless and piercing, like those of some caged wild animal. His high cheek-bones, massive jaws, and thickness of upper skull were indicative of great power. His hands were long and bony, very white, however, and carefully

kept. "This man," I thought, "is capable of being a great fanatic, or a great charlatan." His personality affected me unpleasantly, but I took care not to exhibit any outward evidences of my feelings. In our conversation we touched upon a variety of topics—society, politics, religion. I found him a remarkably intelligent and well-informed man. He was considerable of a diplomat, too. By a series of well-bred questions, adroitly put, he succeeded in informing himself concerning my likes and dislikes, ambitions and hopes, previous career, etc., while I could extract nothing from him of value. He would have made a splendid inquisitor for the Holy Office in the palmy days of the Inquisition. Two things I refrained from telling him: that I was rich, and in love at first sight with Isidaura Moberley.

Presently the butler announced that dinner was served in the oak room. M. Ramidan led the way. The charming old apartment called the oak room was in one of the wings of the building. It was a beautiful specimen of an Elizabethan interior, with a great carved chimney-piece, and trophies of the chase decorating the walls. The tea service was set upon a mammoth oak table, and there

was Miss Moberley to preside over the tea urn. I was more and more charmed with the girl. Her playful fancy and delicate humor made time pass quickly. Ramidan feasted his eyes upon her with undisguised admiration. The barbed arrows of her wit fell upon him thick and fast, but he did not offer to defend himself. Finally she turned to me and said: "M. Ramidan and I have been great friends in the past, but we are now at daggers drawn. He taught me Arabic and Hindustanee, but I am his pupil no longer. What do you think, Mr. Travers? He actually sides with India and Egypt against England. Is that not rank heresy? I will no longer converse in the Indian and Arabic languages with an enemy of England." Here she laughed with peculiar significance. I looked at Ramidan. Beneath his mask of calm I detected signs of annoyance, of wounded pride, which manifested itself in a barely perceptible quiver of the nostrils, a faint redness about the temples, which quickly disappeared, leaving him as sphinx-like and imperturbable as ever. He replied to her sallies in her own merry vein.

Then turning to me, with somewhat altered manner, he said: "Believe me, Mr. Travers, Miss Moberley is laboring under a misappre-

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 31

hension regarding my political opinions. I am not the arch-enemy of England she makes me out to be. Far from it! I sincerely admire the English people, but I am not blind to their faults. Having lived for many years among the natives of India and Egypt, I am in touch with the Oriental point of view. The question amounts to this: Is England fully justified in holding two nations in subjection? By right of conquest, yes! In strict justice, no! When dealing with Eastern countries might has always meant right to the Anglo-Saxon. It has ever been the arbitrament of the sword——”

“Oh, M. Ramidan!” interrupted Miss Moberley. “Have you nothing to say on the side of civilization? Consider what England has done for India and Egypt in the way of social and political regeneration.”

“I have considered all that,” replied Ramidan lightly, “but your boasted Western culture brings with it many evils, the least of which is the curse of alcohol. The Oriental is quick to learn the vices of his foreign master, but slow to absorb his virtues. European civilization has made but little progress among the Hindoos and Egyptians. In my opinion, it is unsuited to the peculiar temper-

32 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

ament and genius of the races of the Orient. Between the thought of the East and the thought of the West, upon all topics of human interest—art, religion, morals—there is an impassable gulf fixed. 'A renaissance in the Orient,' says one of your philosophical writers, 'means the birth of a religion; in the Occident, the death of a religion and the growth of positive knowledge.' The East may well be symbolized by a gigantic Sphinx brooding in the desert upon the mysteries of life and death, time and eternity. The Oriental is a dreamer. Leave him to his dreams; his faith, fanatical though it may be. Better fanaticism than the deadening negations of your boasted Western philosophy and science. The social sores of Europe are as bad, if not worse, than the barbarisms of India, Egypt, or Morocco. I would rather be a beggar in a ragged bournous soliciting alms in the shadow of an Algerine gateway than the proudest of your merchant princes whose ships dot the seven seas. One prostrates himself to Allah at the cry of the muezzin in the tower, the other bows before the Golden Calf in the Market Place, sacrificing to Mammon the life and happiness of his fellow-men. Visit a bazaar in the East, and behold an artisan blithely

singing at his task, fashioning brass, iron, silver, and gold into shapes of fantastic beauty, watching the work of art grow under his hands from the plastic to the perfect product. Then go to the factory of an English manufacturing town, where men and women grow pale and haggard at their monotonous labors; one makes a screwhead, another turns a bolt, and that for ever and ever. Think of the hideousness of the slum; the gin palaces aflame at midnight; the begrimed and besotted people drinking themselves into insensibility, while the black pall of smoke descends upon the place, blighting everything."

" 'Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay,' " I quoted.

Not heeding me, Ramadan continued:

"Give me the undeveloped Orient with its visions of faith and beauty; its silence and repose. The sun still shines there in its ancient splendor, uncorrupted by the poisonous vapors of a million factory chimneys."

"You forget to add where women are enslaved and made the toys of men," said Miss Moberley. "But come, let us change the subject, for we never can agree. By the way, M. Ramadan, when is your wife expected back from London?"

34 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

"I expect her to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock," he answered.

"Very good," she said. "I will send the carriage to the train to meet her."

"Thank you, Miss Isidaura," he replied.

The meal came to an end and we retired to the drawing-room, Miss Moberley leading the way. Our conversation lagged somewhat during the remainder of the evening, but M. Ramidan made up for it by his brilliant performance on the piano, playing for us selections from his favorite composers—Chopin, Liszt, and Tchaikowsky—until bedtime. The butler then took me in charge. Candle in hand, he ascended a flight of dark stairs, and led the way along a resounding gallery to the state bed-chamber, where I was to be located for the night. It was a ghostly old room, with black beams in the ceiling, and a great canopied bed upon a raised dais. The walls were hung with faded tapestry. Over the chimney-piece, which was carved and gilded with armorial blazonings, hung a strange picture representing the building of an ancient temple. A workman in the foreground was busily engaged in carving a grotesque idol out of a huge block of Nubian marble. Upon one of the panels of the apartment was a

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 35

portrait of a cavalier—Prince Rupert, I subsequently learned.

"The room has been unused for some time, sir," said Jennings, "so I have built a fire to take off the dampness and chill."

I thanked him for his thoughtfulness.

Placing the wax taper upon an *escritoire*, the butler withdrew, remarking: "Good-night, sir; and pleasant dreams—but I doubts it!"

This last phrase was mumbled in an undertone and not intended for my ear, but I caught it nevertheless. Calling the old man back, just as he was about shutting the massive oaken door behind him, I said jocularly: "Jennings, what do you mean by wishing me pleasant dreams, and then expressing your doubt on the subject?"

The butler, looking exceedingly abashed, hemmed and hawed for a minute, and then said: "Pardon, sir, an old man's nonsense. I didn't mean for you to overhear my words. But this room is reputed to be haunted, and——"

"Ah, that is it!" I cried. "I am delighted to hear it! Who ever heard of an old English mansion without its ghost? I am charmed to spend the night here, and please thank the

36 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

housekeeper for assigning me to this apartment. A capital introduction to Wyndwood Hall. And, pray, who is the haunter of this chamber? The cynical-looking cavalier whose portrait graces yonder panel? Well, he looks like a gentleman with a none too easy conscience, and given to midnight perambulations of a phantasmal character."

"Indeed, sir, I don't know," replied Jennings, looking embarrassed. "I only repeats what the servants say."

Laughing immoderately, I bade him good-night, whereupon he silently withdrew.

I threw myself into a comfortable armchair before the fireplace. The light from the blazing logs made the mythological figures embroidered on the tapestry seem as if endowed with life and movement. After musing for an hour or more upon the events of the day I retired to bed. In my dreams, the scene depicted in the curious painting over the chimney-piece figured conspicuously. I seemed to be a sculptor carving idols out of blocks of black marble. Try as I might to prevent it, the faces of the monsters invariably assumed the likeness of M. Ramidan. What mocking, fearful visages they were, half human, half

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 37

bestial! As may be imagined, my sleep was broken and perturbed, but I experienced no ghostly visitations. Toward morning I fell into a deep slumber, and awoke much refreshed in mind and body.

CHAPTER III

I MADE a careful toilet and descended to the breakfast-room. No one was about except the old butler, who was engaged in setting the breakfast-table.

"Well, Jennings," I remarked, "I am not late after all, though it is past ten o'clock."

"No, sir," he replied. "We have late breakfasts at Wyndwood Hall now. *Day-jewne à la forkette*, they calls it. Things has changed since the old master died. Then we was English, now everything is foreign and Frenchified. It is coffee and rolls taken in bed, and breakfast at eleven o'clock."

"But you brought me nothing this morning," I exclaimed.

"Pardon, sir, but you looked so tired last night that I hated to wake you too early. Besides, Mistress bade me let you sleep late. From to-morrow, sir, you can adopt the new-fangled French ways, and have your coffee and rolls served in bed."

"By all means," I said. "I am lately from France, and used to French customs."

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 39

"A wicked, barbarous nation, sir; begging your pardon."

"Anathematize the French as much as you like," I said, laughing; "I am an American. But really they are not so black as they are painted."

"My father was a Waterloo vet'ran, sir, and hated the French like poison. He lost a leg in that battle."

"Well, he had good reason to hate them. But believe me, Jennings, the French are a very clever and polite people; as for their cooking, it is divine."

The garrulous old family servitor shook his head sadly, but made no response to my remark. Clearly he had a grievance, which, like Tam o' Shanter's wife, he was nursing to keep warm.

"Is Miss Moberley down yet?" I inquired.

"Yes, sir," said Jennings. "She is out on the terrace, trimming the rose-bushes. This way, if you please."

I followed the old man out upon the broad terrace of Wyndwood Hall. The great mastiff, Cæsar, came to meet me, and rubbed his massive head affectionately against me. Clearly I had made friends with the dog. Around an angle of the house I found Miss

40 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

Moberley at work over her rose-bushes. Her hands were gauntleted, and she was armed with a glittering pair of shears. As I approached she turned to greet me, whereupon the butler discreetly withdrew to his work in the breakfast-room. As beautiful as Aurora, goddess of the dawn, looked this charming girl. Her gown was of white muslin, and she wore on her head a large hat to protect her from the sun. Advancing to meet me, she drew off one of her gauntlets and frankly proffered me her hand. I took it, and would have pressed it to my lips, if such old-fashioned courtesy had been in vogue. But, alas, it was not!

"I'm afraid you will find Wyndwood Hall very dull, Mr. Travers," she remarked. "It is a lonely old place, but I love it. From the clock-tower a magnificent view may be had of the sea. But I must show you my particular charge—a quaint seventeenth century garden." We descended a broad flight of moldy stone steps, and, passing around to the side of the house, were in the garden. It was indeed a quaint place, surrounded by a tall hedge clipped and trimmed in somewhat fantastic style. A sun-dial, crumbling and weather-beaten, stood in the center, like a sen-

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 41

tinel on guard, and near by was a dilapidated, unused fountain. Beds of flowers and several ancient oaks completed the picture of this calm, restful spot, where the bees hummed drowsily and the birds stuffed their nests undisturbed into the horns of the stone Tritons that formed the center-piece of the fountain. We sat down on a mossy stone bench and conversed like old friends. She asked me many questions about myself, country, my studies, and hopes of the future, finally remarking: "You must excuse my frankness, Mr. Travers, on so short an acquaintance, but I feel that we are to become good friends. You are to devote some of your time to me while at Wyndwood Hall."

"I should like to devote my entire time to you," were the words that trembled on my lips, but were left unsaid. She seemed to divine my thoughts, for she hastened to explain her meaning, a faint blush suffusing her damask cheeks: "My education, Mr. Travers, has been sadly neglected in the sciences. You are to act as my instructor for an hour each day. My particular fad is chemistry, of which I know only the rudiments. A strange study, is it not, for a young lady to pursue? But I inherit my taste from my father. He

42 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

was a famous chemist. In his latter years he conceived the mad idea of making gold, like the alchemists of old; and the result—behold it around you! The house is a ruin, the land impoverished, and money wasted! My uncle, Colonel Moberley, is possessed with the same fatal passion. He implicitly believes in the dreams of the medieval alchemists, and is encouraged by——”

She paused, frowned, and crushed a twig beneath her foot.

“You mean M. Ramidan?” I asked.

“Hush!” she whispered, looking about her fearfully. “I mentioned no names.”

“My dear Miss Moberley,” I continued, in a more subdued tone, “you have thus far trusted me. You have expressed an opinion that we were to become good friends. Cannot we date our friendship from to-day—this hour? I know that it is presumptuous, nay, impertinent, in me to solicit so great a favor on so brief an acquaintance—but give me your confidence. I shall not betray it. Believe me, the dearest wish of my heart is to be of service to you.”

I could see the tears well up in her lovely eyes. She wanted to trust me, but her maidenly reserve, her lack of knowledge of my

character, conspired to hold me aloof from her. She struggled to overcome this natural feeling. I held out my hand to her. She looked into my eyes as if she would pierce my very soul. Then, flushing a rosy red, she gave me her delicate little hand to clasp, saying:

"Mr. Travers, I believe you to be a chivalrous and honorable man. I *will* trust you! God knows, I need a friend, and advice. Our family lawyer, Mr. Oldfield, were he here, could give me counsel and comfort when I needed it, but he is so far away, and so engrossed with business affairs, that I cannot look to him for assistance. I dare not communicate with him by mail. My letters to him in the past have been tampered with. Some of them failed to reach him altogether. Mr. Travers, I am surrounded by spies. I am a lonely, miserable, unhappy girl. Believe me, I only keep up by a powerful effort of will, which seems to sap the very foundations of my physical and mental well-being."

I recalled to mind the bold look of admiration on the face of Ramidan the evening previous, when engaged in conversation with Miss Moberley. That look spoke volumes to me, and I hated Ramidan accordingly. It was

44 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

evident that Miss Moberley feared him, and held aloof from him as far as possible. Gifted as he was with a powerful and unscrupulous will, there was no telling what schemes he had on foot for the ruin of the house.

The sweet face so pathetically upturned to mine moved my very soul with profoundest pity. I loved her then as I had never loved woman before. My first glimpse of Isidaura Moberley, enframed in the ancient doorway of the Hall drawing-room, had entranced me and bound me captive with golden chains to the chariot wheels of all-conquering Cupid. I was enamored of her at first sight. It seemed to me, at the time, that we had met before and loved each other in some dim period of the past, so unreservedly, so perfectly did my soul go out to hers. But I dared not hint of my passion; she would have shrunk in disdain from me. I had not the slightest intimation that I was loved in return. Time could only tell. As matters stood, I was her very good and devoted friend. She had given me her girlish confidence, and I vowed not to abuse it with a premature declaration of love. I longed to break lance for her sake, and prove my knightly fettle against the consummate trickster and charlatan, Ramidan. My first impression of him was correct.

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 45

I learned from Miss Moberley some of the family history which interested me exceedingly. Her father had not inherited Wyndwood Hall, but had purchased it in open market, the estate not being entailed. After dissipating his fortune in absurd alchemical researches, he died suddenly in his laboratory, and the estate passed to Isidaura. It was heavily mortgaged. A very small child at the time of her father's decease, Isidaura went to live with her uncle and guardian, John Moberley, at an obscure English watering place. Eventually Colonel Moberley, for he was a retired Anglo-Indian officer, took up his residence at the old Hall, and there Isidaura led a very happy life. Her only female attendant was the housekeeper, Mrs. Brandon, who became devotedly attached to the child. Colonel Moberley was a gloomy, morose man, immersed in occult studies. As he grew older, and became badly afflicted with the gout, he rarely left the great portable invalid's chair in his study. Adjoining this study was the laboratory, for Colonel Moberley was as enthusiastic an alchemist as his brother had been.

In the summer of 18— Colonel John Moberley and his niece were at X., a little German Spa, famous for its cures of gout,

46 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

etc. There they met M. and Mme. Ramidan, cosmopolites of cosmopolites. Ramidan posed as a native of Armenia, and his wife as a Russian lady of distinction. They seemed to have money, and to have traveled everywhere. There was a certain air of mystery surrounding the couple that was peculiarly attractive to an imaginative girl like Isidaura. Colonel Moberley was completely fascinated by Ramidan, and invited him and his wife to spend the autumn at Wyndwood Hall. A visit of several months ended in the Ramidans taking up their permanent residence at the Hall. Colonel Moberley found the services of Ramidan indispensable in his magical studies and alchemical investigations. The latter was deeply versed in Oriental philosophy and occultism. Isidaura was now of age, and mistress of Wyndwood Hall and its acres. Besides that she had a trust estate, worth ten thousand pounds, left her by her mother. The will of her father and that of her mother had been drawn up by the same lawyer, Mr. Oldfield. They were identical in terms. The estates were left to Isidaura for life, after that they passed absolutely to a cousin, Captain Godfrey Mainwaring, or he being dead, to a public charity.

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 47

In the event of Isidaura's marriage, however, and her having heirs, Wyndwood Hall and the Kentish estates would descend to them, and Captain Mainwaring's hopes of fortune would be blasted.

Isidaura's accession to her property made but little change in her mode of life. She loved her uncle as a father and indulged him in all his fancies, giving him unusually large sums of money out of the income derived from the investment of her mother's estate. The remainder she devoted religiously to liquidating the mortgage on Wyndwood Hall. This was the status of affairs at the Hall at the time of my arrival on the scene. There was one fact Isidaura failed to reveal to me during her interesting confessions, namely, that she had been betrothed while an infant in the cradle to Captain Mainwaring, who was ten or twelve years her senior. This betrothal was the foolish act of two over-romantic mothers, who desired to see their offspring mated and properly provided for. Mrs. Moberley and Mrs. Mainwaring were cousins and inseparable schoolgirl companions. The sentimental betrothal of their children was the outcome of their friendship. Mrs. Moberley, on her deathbed, made her little daughter

promise to observe the solemn compact, when she came of age, provided Godfrey Mainwaring was equally willing. The fond mother then made her will with the above object in view, and died in the firm belief that Isidaura and Godfrey would some day be united in body and in estate. I only learned of this strange family arrangement on the arrival of Mainwaring at the Hall, but of that anon.

From Miss Moberley I learned that the Ramidans were unwelcome visitors at the Hall to all except her infatuated uncle. They had settled down like locusts upon the place, bag and baggage, with their Arabian servant, Baba, and refused to be routed. They were veritable plagues of Egypt. Ramadan, a species of nineteenth century Cagliostro, had gotten old Colonel Moberley completely in his power, and like a vampire was sucking the life blood from his veins. The money given to her uncle by Isidaura went into the capacious maw of the foreign charlatan, though it was presumably spent in chimerical alchemical researches. Miss Moberley feared Ramadan. He was an unscrupulous pretender, who stopped at nothing to encompass his ends. She seemed to divine intuitively that she was the object of some dark design on the part of

the so-called Armenian, but just what, it was impossible to fathom. His very presence was loathsome to her, but she did her best to appear unconcerned in his presence. Poor, unsophisticated girl, she had no one to turn to except the aged housekeeper, who was fast lapsing into senility. My appearance at the Hall lent new courage to Isidaura. To me she turned instinctively for aid, impelled by her fear of Ramidan and by the natural impulsiveness of her nature. I had been engaged to assist in the alchemical investigations, for Colonel Moberley was too much of an invalid to render much aid in laboratory work. Destiny had led me thither from over the sea, and designed that I should play a prominent rôle in the strange drama that was to be enacted at Wyndwood Hall.

The tinkling of the breakfast bell put an end to my conversation with Miss Moberley. We adjourned to the house. M. Ramidan was not present at the meal, so I had the lovely Isidaura *tête-à-tête*. Jennings informed us that Ramidan had gone to Stillwater to send a dispatch to his wife. When breakfast was over I was introduced to the invalid, Colonel Moberley. I found him a shattered, querulous old man, who demanded constant

attention from his valet. He growled out a perfunctory welcome, and then entered upon a discussion of my qualifications as a chemist. My replies seemed to satisfy him. He finally dismissed me with a wave of his hand, remarking: "I am a great sufferer from the gout, Mr. Travers, and regret that I can do nothing to entertain you. Your services will not be required until to-morrow morning. In the meantime, my niece will take pleasure in showing you the old Hall and its historical curios."

"Yes, uncle," she replied, "that is what I was going to propose. I have already introduced Mr. Travers to the seventeenth century garden."

She stooped and kissed the old man affectionately on the cheek, and inquired about his health. I could see from his expression of countenance that he was fond of her, though in a selfish sort of way.

CHAPTER IV

THANKS to Isidaura, who acted as my cicerone, I saw Wyndwood Hall to perfection. It was an old, moated mansion, dating back to the reign of Queen Elizabeth, having been built by a certain Sir Davenant Redcastle, who was an ardent Catholic, and in consequence of that fact lived under a cloud of suspicion. Said Isidaura: "The chroniclers have it that the staunch old knight was in the habit of befriending and harboring fugitive priests, notwithstanding the severe penal laws on the subject. Many of his Protestant neighbors declared that there was a secret chamber cunningly constructed in the walls of the house, wherein the wretched priests found refuge from their pursuers. Dragoons, headed by pursuivants, frequently invaded the premises to search for this hiding place and its supposed occupants, but were never successful in their quest. Doubtless this story about the secret chamber was a myth, invented by some overzealous

monk-baiter. However, the legend of the Monk's Room has survived to this day. The domestics discuss it in the servants' hall, and place implicit belief in it."

"It is a very romantic story," I said, "and quite in keeping with an old mansion like Wyndwood Hall."

"More absurd than all," continued Isidaura, "the silly fools have invented a story about a hapless priest having been starved to death in the secret chamber, during an enforced residence of Sir Davenant in the Tower of London. The ghost of a hooded friar is supposed to haunt the left wing of the Hall. The phantasm, however, is only seen when sickness or death threatens some member of the household."

"Very much like the banshee of Irish folklore," I interrupted.

"English servants, Mr. Travers, are very superstitious. Nothing delights them more than an old-world tale of magic and mystery, horror and bloodshed."

"Are you not the least bit affected by these stories?" I asked.

"Mr. Travers," replied Miss Moberley solemnly, "it is not the dead I fear, but the *living*."

I said no more on the subject of the Monk's Room, but I confess that my curiosity was excited. Perhaps such a secret apartment did actually exist. Where there is smoke there is fire. Legends usually develop from facts, distorting them, it is true, yet preserving enough of the original to identify them, if one chooses to investigate. Every practiced genealogist knows this.

Wyndwood Hall had withstood a siege by the Parliamentary forces during the great Revolution. Stout Sir Anthony Redcastle, a rigid Catholic like his ancestors, espoused the cause of the King, and raised a troop of horse on the estate. He fought under that brave but headstrong cavalier, Prince Rupert, taking part in many of the memorable battles of the period. Shut up in Wyndwood Hall, with a part of his command, he defended it right gallantly against the Roundheads, until the siege was raised by Rupert himself. A portrait of Sir Anthony was to be seen in the library, painted by Van Dyck. The doughty cavalier was depicted in all the panoply of war—steel cap, cuirass, and gauntlets, with a brilliant baldrick about his shoulder, and a Spanish rapier hanging by his side. Sir Anthony, like his father before him, was an enthusiastic

54 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

alchemist. He loved Prince Rupert because of the latter's interest in Rosicrucian researches. Rupert, according to the story, experimented in the knight's laboratory after the siege of the Hall, and visited the place many times during the Restoration. Sir Anthony, so runs the chronicle, despite the fact that he always wore a glass mask when at work among his retorts and crucibles, was one day found unconscious upon the floor of the laboratory, overcome by the poisonous exhalations of some deadly drug with which he was experimenting. The glass mask was shattered to atoms. He died shortly afterward, anathematizing his folly and the delusions which had ruined his estates. His curse seemed to rest upon Wyndwood Hall. Strange, was it not, that Isidaura's father, upon purchasing the estate from an impoverished descendant of the cavalier-alchemist, should become imbued with the wild dreams of the searchers after the philosopher's stone? His scientific friends deserted him, calling him "Mad Moberley." After him came Isidaura's uncle.

The ancient armory and portrait gallery of the mansion pleased me most of all. It was a long Gothic room on the second floor, with a

splendid vaulted roof, and lighted by great mullioned windows, filled with stained glass. There was a superb chimney-piece, richly emblazoned with the armorial bearings of the Redcastles. The motto of the house, "Faithful unto Death," told volumes of the former owners, whose adherence to the Roman Catholic Church had cost them so dearly: severe persecution under Elizabeth and James I., and the blight of penal restrictions of later reigns. Stands of armor occupied the four corners of the room. Upon the oaken panels of the walls were the grim portraits of the Redcastles—knights in armor, judges in ermine and red, and gentlemen and ladies in a variety of quaint costumes, some of them with their heads swallowed up in the huge ruffs of the Elizabethan period and the gigantic periwigs of the Restoration; others with powdered polls of the time of the Georges—dead and turned to dust long ago.

"I sometimes feel like an interloper among all these worthies," sighed Miss Moberley; "they are not my ancestors, you know. The dissipated fellow who sold the estate to my father is dead long ago. He was the last of his race. With him the family of Redcastle became extinct. Curiously enough, he had

56 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

some remains of sentiment about him. Dying in a miserable lodging in London, a perfect wreck of humanity, he left a dirty scrap of paper begging my father to place his body in the family mausoleum that he might repose amid the bones of his people. His wishes were complied with. Would you like to see the place? My father and mother are buried there."

I assented, and she led the way to a not very distant part of the park, where stood a huge brown marble mausoleum. An iron grating permitted one to look into a small mortuary chapel, where services for the departed were once performed. From that an iron door led downward into the crypt. The scenery about this silent home of the dead was very beautiful. Aged and stately oaks lifted their tall heads to the sky, and, when the wind blew, whispered to each other the secrets of bygone days. From this quiet, restful spot a picturesque vista could be obtained of the ivy-clad Hall. Colonies of rooks had built their castles in the tree tops, and kept up a constant chattering at early morn and at sunset. A perfect repose seemed to have settled upon the ancient mansion, which had sheltered under its roof so many strange souls. The

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 57

bronze Sphinx over the lodge gate, the genius of the scene, was wrapt in slumber.

"This is the House of the Sphinx," I remarked to Miss Moberley.

She looked at me with startled eyes.

"Yes, indeed, Mr. Travers," she replied, in melancholy tones, "this is indeed the House of the Sphinx, and the Sphinx, as of old, has its riddle to propound. Woe be unto the person who fails to solve it."

The sun was setting as we returned to the Hall, to prepare for dinner. A carriage was at the door. The butler, the housekeeper, the footman, and several under-domestics were seen scurrying to and fro, carrying bundles from the lumbering old vehicle to the house.

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"The real mistress of Wyndwood Hall has arrived," answered Miss Moberley, her pale face flushing crimson. "Mme. Ramidan is back from London."

Bidding me *au revoir* until the dinner hour, she went round to a side entrance, and disappeared into the house. I walked leisurely to the front portal, just in time to see a very stout woman being assisted from the carriage by M. Ramidan and the butler. Behind her

came a diminutive, impish-looking little boy, whose Oriental turban, robe, and slippers stamped him as the Arabian servant, Baba.

At dinner I had the pleasure (?) of an introduction to Mme. Ramidan. She was an enormously fat and flabby woman, with a puffy, yellow face, ornamented with a flat Kal-muck nose. Her little eyes were full of low cunning. A mop of faded flaxen hair, twisted in a species of hirsute turban, gave her a most ludicrous appearance. She was gaudily dressed and bedecked with jewels, even wearing rings upon her stumpy thumbs. Bourgeoise and vulgar to the backbone, her pretense to relationship with the nobility of Russia was laughable in the extreme. That she was of Slavic origin, however, admitted of no doubt. Her face was evidence of that fact. She was a species of female Cossack, wild, unkempt, Bohemian; a monstrosity physically and morally, worthy of the gloomy genius of a Poushkin or Dostoievsky. Truly she was an admirable foil to Ramidan—a veritable Lorenza Feliciani. I would have given much to have read the secrets of her past career, to have drawn aside the veil of Isis and discovered the she-Cagliostro, the modern pythoness, in her stage-boudoir, surrounded by her rouge-pots,

her grotesque masks and tinsel robes, making up for the rôle of grand hierophantess of the Mysteries. She spoke of her visits to Egypt, India, and Thibet, and the psychic phenomena she had witnessed in those lands, particularly in the lamaseries of the latter country. Occultism was her fad. She talked glibly of goetic magic, astrology, the Cabala, Rosicrucian mysticism, and theosophy. When she learned that I was a member of the Masonic Fraternity, she deplored the fact that there existed no Egyptian rite *à la* Cagliostro, to which women could be admitted.

"Masonry," she said, "lost its true significance when it abandoned the study of the occult. The true successors of the Knights Templars, the Freemasons of the eighteenth century, avenged the death of Jacques de Molai, and overthrew the *ancien régime* of France. Freemasonry had a great future before it, but it soon became debased by the spirit of commercialism. It lost its ideals. To-day it is a meaningless rite. My husband, who is a member of all esoteric orders, Oriental and Western, is in England for the purpose of founding a branch of the Oriental rite of Isis and Osiris, which teaches circular masonry as contradistinguished from square

60 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

masonry, which is the product of the Occident."

Her jargon amused me beyond measure, and gave me a clue to her character. I learned that she was the secretary of numerous occult fraternities, and was deluged with correspondence. She was a sort of theosophical Mrs. Jellyby, whose ink-stained fingers were in everybody's business—and pockets.

CHAPTER V

THE day after the arrival of Mme. Ramidan upon the scene my laboratory work began in earnest, and continued without interruption for weeks. The place where the experiments were carried on was an octagonal chamber located in a disused wing of the building—the one reputed to be haunted by the ignorant domestics of the Hall. The laboratory was well supplied with furnace, crucibles, bottles, alembics, and the multifarious apparatus of the working chemist, ancient and modern. The stone walls of the apartment were begrimed with soot, and the place was dimly lighted, except where the red fire of the furnace illumined the scene.

Colonel Moberley, looking like a mummy just emerged from a sarcophagus, sat in his great armchair and supervised the alchemical operations. By his side was a worm-eaten chest containing a number of quaint Black-Letter folios by Nicholas Flamel, Sandivog-

62 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

ius, Paracelsus, and other masters of magic and alchemy. The Colonel consulted these ponderous volumes from time to time, pored over their symbolical pictures, and read curious directions and recipes from them. His valet stood by his side, grave and sedate, to lift the books from the chest to the reading desk attached to the chair. To see the wrinkled, parchment-faced old man bending over these ancient folios, and turning the pages with his withered, claw-like fingers was indeed a curious sight. It was very foolish and absurd to pander thus to the monomania of an old dotard. I felt that my reputation as a scientific man was at stake, to say nothing of my claims to sanity. But, alas! what could I do? I loved Isidaura Moberley with all my heart. To have resigned my position would have been to desert her in her hour of direst need; to have lost her forever. The dark shadows of impending evil were already gathering. Come what may, I resolved to remain at Wyndwood Hall. The summer passed into autumn. Leaves began to flutter down upon the bosom of the sad earth.

Ramidan was the presiding genius of the laboratory. He possessed considerable knowledge of chemistry. He had complained of his head suffering from the fumes of the

chemicals, hence my engagement as assistant. However, he always managed to be present when anything of importance was *en tapis*. The constant failures to transmute the baser metals into gold were always ascribed by him to some esoteric cause, such as a misinterpretation of the alchemical jargon of Nicholas Flamel or Sandivogius, or to the fact that the planetary spirits were not propitious. Ramidan told impossible stories of successful transmutations witnessed by him in the laboratories of the Orient, and bade his patron not to despair, but continue the good work. In the meantime there was a constant flowing of gold from the pockets of Colonel Moberley to those of Ramidan. Isidaura saw this, but kept discreetly silent. She did not wish to anger her uncle, who had been a second father to her. The Colonel had implicit faith in the charlatan.

Poor old Colonel Moberley!—dead and buried years ago! What has become of your restless spirit? Avarice had you in its deadly clutches while upon earth. Have you learned in that shadowy world beyond the grave that the only true alchemy is love; that the real transmutation of metals is the converting of one's baser self into the higher life of the soul, which is unselfishness?

64 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

The octagon chamber of Wyndwood Hall was a real Faust's study, the abode of magic and mystery. Ramidan was the evil spirit, the Mephistopheles of the scene. In an alcove, curtained off from the rest of the apartment, was the *sanctum sanctorum*, or holy of holies, which was hung with black draperies and illuminated by wax tapers placed in tall candelabra. The lights were arranged about a triangular wooden altar, which was covered with a white cloth. Upon this shekinah were placed a human skull, a parchment-bound, iron-clasped grimoire containing spells and conjurations, and a glittering sword, the blade of which was engraved with various cabalistic characters, known only to mystics and Rosicrucians. Over the altar was suspended a magic or magnetic mirror, constructed of some black substance. Its surface was highly polished and reflected the rays of the tapers.

To behold Ramidan decked out in his Zoroastrian robe of white linen, with a girdle embroidered in gold and silver, was truly a sight for the gods. Armed with the mystic sword and long white wand, he officiated as hierophant of the Mysteries. His wife enacted the rôle of pythoness or seeress. She would take her seat before the altar and gaze

intently into the magic mirror. Oriental perfumes were then cast upon a brazier of burning coals by the magician, whereupon an impenetrable smoke would arise. Mme. Ramidan, under the influence of the magnetic passes of her husband, would sink gradually into a supposed hypnotic slumber, during which she attained an exalted mental illumination or perception of the invisible world; at least this was the theory of Ramidan. While in this state of psychosis, she would commune with the elemental and planetary spirits, answering questions put to her by her husband on alchemical subjects. In the mirror she also professed to witness scenes passing at a distance, and described to us many strange events, which she alleged were taking place in Egypt and India.

I asked Ramidan to explain the purport of these séances. He replied as follows, as well as I can recollect:

"I practice what is known as cabalistic alchemy. To succeed one must possess psychic power over the atoms of matter, so that by the action of the human will they shall group themselves to form the metal desired. Not being sensitive enough myself to astral influences, I require the services of a clairvoyant

66 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

and clairaudient. Mme. Ramidan exactly fills the conditions. Astral light is the important factor in these investigations. It is closely related to the 'radiant matter' of modern chemists and the 'ether' of physicists. According to a prominent hermetic philosopher, 'Astral light is the universal plastic mediator, the common receptacle of vibrations of motion and of the phantoms of form.' It is likewise the Od of the Hebrews and the learned Baron von Reichenbach; the great Thelesma of Hermes Trismegistus. The control of this force constitutes the great arcana of practical magic. When the universal light magnetizes the universe, it is called astral light; when it forms metals it is denominated Azoth, or the Mercury of the Sages; when it gives light to animals it is termed animal magnetism. The astral undulations determine the position of atoms or neutralize them. Herein lies the secret of transmutation, and it becomes the privilege of the hermetist to acquire the power of controlling this agent. When Mme. Ramidan becomes more proficient in psychic power we shall obtain remarkable results. As matters now stand, I am very well pleased indeed."

I thought to myself: "You have need to

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 67

be satisfied, for you have succeeded in befooiling your employer and plundering him of his money. What more could a charlatan desire? ”

After my laboratory work was over for the day I gave lessons in physics and chemistry to Miss Moberley. She proved an apt and interested pupil. Lessons over, we spent a great deal of time together in the library, poring over books and manuscripts. I was not slow in perceiving that she took pleasure in my society. Oftentimes our studies and literary recreations were interrupted by Mme. Ramadan, who undoubtedly came to spy upon us. She made all sorts of clumsy excuses for these intrusions. Though never a word of love was exchanged between Isidaura Moberley and myself, I knew instinctively that she was fond of me. We judge of these *affaires du cœur* by trifles. Once she placed her hand on my arm in a pleading, familiar sort of way, while discussing some topic of art or literature. It was a half unconscious act. When she fully realized what she had done, she blushed deeply and begged my pardon. On another occasion one of her blond curls, stirred by the breeze, brushed my face, and became entangled in a button of my coat. We were

68 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

poring together over the musty pages of an old Latin folio at the time. It was with some little trouble that I disengaged the stray lock. I confess the tender impeachment that I purposely magnified the difficulties of the operation. Would Corydon have acted any differently with Phyllis? It brought our cheeks closely together. My heart beat like a trip-hammer. The room swam before me. I wanted to take the dear girl in my arms then and rain kisses upon her face, but I dared not. She divined intuitively my thought, for flushing rosily, she said in considerable trepidation:

"Pardon my awkwardness, Mr. Trav-
ers!"

I read her mind like an open book. She imagined that I considered the trifling incident as premeditated—a piece of coquetry on her part. But she was no coquette. Her character was too frank and sympathetic for that.

"It was the wind's fault," I said, "not yours, and the wind bloweth where it listeth."

"Yes," she replied. "That is so." The blush faded away from her cheeks, leaving them deadly pale. Her bosom heaved, her lips trembled, as she gazed earnestly out of

the window at the sunbeams playing among the branches of the trees. My scruples about premature declarations of love to Isidaura were suddenly overcome by the passion that overwhelmed me. "Now or never," I thought, "is the time for an overt expression of my feelings."

Taking her unresisting hand in mine, I began slowly: "Miss Moberley, Isidaura——"

I got no further. Springing to her feet like a frightened fawn, she stammered out, "Oh, pray excuse me, Mr. Travers! I must really go and arrange my coiffure. It is falling to pieces."

She left the room hurriedly, leaving me deeply chagrined and embarrassed.

It was evident that she wished to avoid a proposal of love. I did not broach the subject soon again, but acted the coldly polite and formal part of a tutor. That she was deeply pained at this new attitude of mine was apparent. We met no more in the old garden. Our studies were abandoned; she giving as an excuse household duties and the care of her invalid uncle.

A man is a timid creature after all in his dealings with women. His pride, or rather his colossal egotism, is so easily hurt. Most of us

are prone to imagine that the citadel of a woman's heart is to be had for the mere asking, and bitter our disappointment and wounded self-esteem when we receive a set back or refusal. Some hearts must be regularly laid siege to, and after many days, when a breach is effected, must be taken by storm and captured. I soon received my punishment for abandoning the siege of Isidaura's heart. One morning I awoke to find a rival in the field. It was Captain Mainwaring, Isidaura's cousin. He came down from London for the shooting season, accompanied by his valet. Guns, dogs, and traps innumerable formed part of his impedimenta. Miss Moberley drove over to meet him at the station, and brought him back to the Hall. M. and Mme. Ramadan gave the Captain an effusive welcome. Evidently they were old friends. At the dinner-table that evening I had an opportunity for studying the military gentleman.

Captain Godfrey Mainwaring was the typical English guardsman, tall, muscular, blond. His manner was haughty and supercilious in the extreme. His age was thirty-five or thereabouts, but he seemed much older, owing to his *blasé*, careworn look. It required no mas-

ter of the art of physiognomy to divine the fact that beneath the mask of a well-bred gentleman which he had assumed, there lay the grinning visage of a satyr, versed in all the vices of the age. He completely ignored my presence at the table, devoting himself assiduously to his fair cousin, Isidaura. Doubtless in his mind I was an interloper, a species of higher-class servant, to be tolerated, but that was about all. A man of the world and fond of society, he knew how to make himself agreeable. I must confess that I felt a pang of the bitterest jealousy at his attentions to Miss Moberley. I sat next to Mme. Ramadan and had little or nothing to say. I fear I acquitted myself like a boor, but luckily for me, the lady monopolized the conversation with her inevitable stories of the Orient, and I simply had to nod my head or reply in monosyllables occasionally.

It proved a most uncomfortable meal to me, and I was glad when it was over. The cold, piercing eyes of Ramadan were constantly fixed upon me. A faint smile, ironical and fraught with disdain, played upon his bloodless lips.

I thought to myself, "And hast thou found me out, O mine enemy?"

Had he divined my love for Isidaura? In my innermost soul I felt that it was so. Miss Moberley rose from the table, remarking, with a gay little laugh:

"I leave you, gentlemen, to your wine, and politics. Come, Mme. Ramadan, let us to the drawing-room."

She swept gracefully toward the door, looking like a princess, in her rustling silk dress, and with a splendid necklace of pearls about her slender throat. She had arrayed herself in her best attire to receive the Captain. Never had I seen her look more beautiful. The excitement of the occasion had brought an exquisite flush to her otherwise pale cheeks. Her eyes sparkled like diamonds. I would have accompanied her to the drawing-room, not caring particularly for the society of the guardsman and Ramadan, but I hesitated too long, piqued at Isidaura's apparent partiality for the Captain. He who hesitates is lost! So says the ancient adage. It proved true on this occasion. Captain Mainwaring sprang quickly up from his chair, offered Miss Moberley his arm and escorted her from the room, protesting all the while that he cared nothing for post-prandial toasts and politics. His pleasure was to be near her.

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 73

Mme. Ramidan followed the couple. I was alone with Ramidan, as deeply chagrined as it was possible to be.

"Ah, they have deserted us, Mr. Travers," said Ramidan. "But here comes Jennings with a magnum of champagne. Let us enjoy ourselves."

I was mad enough to have struck him, but I resumed my chair, completely under the spell of his strong personality. We talked about the weather, vintages of France, etc. Finally he remarked:

"What do you think of our friend, the guardsman, eh?"

"I don't care to pass an opinion on a man I scarcely know," I answered morosely. "He is well enough, I presume."

Ramidan lifted his bushy eyebrows a trifle, and seemed amused at my churlishness, remarking:

"I was alluding more particularly to Mainwaring's looks, not his manners. Of the latter, the least said the better. However, he improves upon acquaintance, Mr. Travers. He has been a rake and spendthrift, like most of the dandies of the military clubs, but he intends settling down now, and playing the justice, with 'eyes severe, and beard of formal

74 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

cut,' as Shakespeare has it. They will make a handsome pair."

He said this lightly, pouring out a glass of wine at the time.

"Who?" I asked unconsciously.

"Why, don't you know? But of course not! How should you on so brief a sojourn among us? Captain Mainwaring and Miss Isidaura Moberley are betrothed. Their marriage is a thing of the near future."

At this cruel blow my heart seemed to stop beating. Everything in the room swam before my eyes. Looking up with apparent surprise, Ramidan remarked:

"My dear Mr. Travers, what is the matter? You look ill!"

"Oh, nothing!" I replied, regaining my composure with a powerful effort. "I have been overworking of late in the laboratory. The heat of this room—the wine—caused a sudden indisposition. That is all." I was determined to let the man see that I was indifferent to the news which he had just imparted to me.

"What you say, sir, about the approaching nuptials of Miss Moberley and Captain Mainwaring is indeed surprising. I had no in-

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 75

klings of the matter. I trust they will be very happy."

"Of course they will," answered Ramidan, eying me closely. "At least, I can speak for Mainwaring. He is desperately in love with his cousin. Godfrey has sown a large crop of wild oats, sufficient to last him for the remainder of his existence. He will settle down into an admirable specimen of the British country gentleman, with not a thought above fox-hunting and raising prize cattle for an agricultural show. Bah, what stupidity! But the English are all alike! I say this to you, Mr. Travers, for you are an American, ambitious, pushing, a man of science. Ah, what would I not give for your youth and splendid illusions."

I did not press the subject further. We rose from the table and went out upon the terrace to pay homage to the Goddess Nicotine preparatory to joining the ladies in the drawing-room. The moon had risen, flooding the scene with its tranquil light. An all-pervading sense of sadness weighed upon my soul. I felt that Isidaura was lost to me forever. I suffered the torments of the damned.

76 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

"Suppose we join the ladies now," remarked Ramidan, throwing away his cigarette, and looking at me attentively. I was in the shadow of one of the buttresses of the building; he could not see my face, or note my agitation, save through the tremor of my voice.

"I will be with you presently," I said, "when I have finished my cigar."

He left me. The blood flowed back to my heart. I began to regain something of my old self, despite the black pall of despair which enveloped me.

"The heartless flirt," I hissed. "I have been living in a fool's paradise, and all through her wiles. Oh, idiot that I have been! Doubtless she and her lover are laughing at me this very moment."

Then, upon reflection, I tried to recall wherein she had *deceived* me. She had shown a marked preference for my society, and confided her troubles to me, but that was all. Doubtless I was self-deceived. Reason, however, as I might, I could not forgive her, and vowed to leave the Hall at the first opportunity. I was in this black and morose mood, when a light touch fell upon my arm. Turning quickly, I beheld Miss Moberley stand-

ing in the moonlight by my side. So engrossed was I by my bitter reflections that I did not hear her approach. How lovely she looked in her white evening dress, with an Indian shawl thrown over her shoulders!

"Well," I said curtly.

"Mr. Travers," she replied softly, "you were angry with me at dinner. I spoke to you several times, but you hardly noticed me. Tell me, how have I offended you?"

"You have not offended me at all," I responded coldly.

"Come, come, Mr. Travers!" she persisted. "You cannot deceive me that way. You have never treated me thus before. I must have said something, done something, to offend you. Tell me what it is?"

"Miss Moberley, you have done nothing to give me offense, I assure you."

"Say you so," she remarked, with a slight trace of asperity in her voice. "Then by what right, pray, have you adopted this cold, hard, contemptuous way of treating me?"

With a little quiver of her lips, she continued: "Oh, Mr. Travers, is this your boasted friendship for a motherless girl? Indeed I thought better of you. I realize fully the impulsiveness of my character. I am apt

78 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

to say and do things on the spur of the moment, that I am afterward sorry for. Pardon me! Perhaps I was rude or indifferent to you? I would not thus humble myself before you were it not for the fact that I cannot afford to lose a true friend."

My anger vanished like "snow upon the desert's dusty face." A great wave of tenderness and sympathy swept over me. Forgetting everything, I cried, passionately:

"Oh, Miss Moberley, Isidaura, forgive me! You are innocent of all intention of hurting me. It was my own miserable mistake. I see it all now! I beheld you with that man—Mainwaring! I heard to-night for the first time that you were betrothed to him. I was mad with rage and jealousy. I love you with my whole soul. Pardon this outburst of passion. I know that it is unmanly of me. I will go away to-morrow, and never see you more."

The subtle, beautiful smile that illumined her sweet face was like the breaking of a rainbow through a cloud.

"Why go away?" she said shyly. "True, I was betrothed in my cradle to Captain Godfrey Mainwaring, but that does not indicate that I am going to marry him. I promised my dear mother on her deathbed that I would

one day wed my cousin, but that can never be. Were my mother alive to-day she would never keep me to the engagement. She loved me too dearly to see me mated to a dissolute, unworthy man. My eyes are opened to my cousin's true character. The revelation has filled me with loathing and disgust."

"Then you do not love him! You will not marry him!" I cried rapturously.

"No! I have this very evening informed him that our engagement is irrevocably broken."

"Is there a ray of hope for me?" I asked.

"Henry!" was all she said.

I took her in my arms and folded her to my heart. The kiss I pressed upon her lips was the first kiss of love she had ever received from man. How long we remained in this lover-like attitude I knew not. There was a rustling of leaves near by and Mme. Ramadan stood before us. Isidaura, her face covered with blushes, slid from my embrace, and fled to the house. I remained staring at the Russian woman, half inclined to anger, half disposed to laugh. She had evidently seen all, heard all, but she did not move a muscle. Her broad flat face was as expressionless as a wax doll. Love tiffs and makings-up are de-

80 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

lightful little comedies intended only for the delectation of the actors therein. An audience is clearly *de trop*.

"I came to look for Isidaura," she said. "The gentlemen want her to join them at the piano. Captain Mainwaring and Miss Moberley sing duets delightfully, Mr. Travers. It is a real treat to listen to them, their voices blend so well together. M. Ramadan plays their accompaniments."

I offered Mme. Ramadan my arm, and conducted her into the house, where we found Mainwaring, Ramadan, and Isidaura already gathered at the piano. Isidaura and her cousin sang a number of Italian arias very prettily, after which Ramadan played selections from the works of Richard Wagner. Isidaura stood near him, to turn over the pages of the music, the feathery exotic plant forming a pleasing background to the picture. Again I was seized with the old impression of a jungle in India; Ramadan was metamorphosed into a beast crouching amid the rank grasses ready to spring upon his victim—and, upon this occasion, the victim an Oriental princess, Isidaura. The scene swam before my eyes like some weird phantasmagoria. Involuntarily I started from my

chair, to interpose between them. The spell was broken. The vision faded away, and I was placed in an embarrassing predicament. Ramidan rose from the piano and advanced toward me. A strange smile illumined his ghastly face.

"The music has excited you!" he exclaimed sarcastically. Had the wretch read my mind by some occult process?

"A thousand thanks," I stammered, "for your magnificent rendition of a favorite composer of mine." I then sank back upon my chair confusedly.

"You like Wagner, then?" he asked.

"Tremendously," I replied. "I have had the supreme pleasure of attending the Wagnerian festivals at Beyreuth."

"Yes," said Ramidan, "Wagner is the great symbolist of sound; the exponent of mysticism in music. He is a giant walking among pigmies, and bears the same relation to music that Michael Angelo does to painting and sculpture. His conceptions are colossal. Life, death, eternity are his themes. Like Pythagoras of old, he had listened to the music of the rolling spheres—the great harmonies of heaven, beyond the ken of ordinary mortal. Believe me, there is a profound mean-

82 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

ing in that line in Job, 'When the morning stars sang together.'"

From the mystical in music we drifted to the mystical in literature and art. Ramidan dwelt upon the influence of the Orient upon Western thought and philosophy.

"From out of the mysterious East," he said, "have come all of the saviors of humanity—Krishna, Zoroaster, the Buddha, Christ, Moses, and Mohammed. Alongside of a grotesque idol worship in India you have a metaphysics of the most subtle character. Plato, Pythagoras, Plotinus, and Proclus were imbued with Oriental theosophies. In modern times you have the philosophers, Spinoza and Schopenhauer, who looked to the Orient for inspiration. With the burning of the great library at Alexandria, the world lost most of the ancient lore. Egypt!—ah, that is a name to conjure with. The wisdom of the world was collected there. Moses was learned in all the arts of the Egyptians, and was initiated into the priestly mysteries; so with Plato, Pythagoras, and Herodotus. But the sun of Egypt has set. Who now can read the riddle of the Sphinx."

Mme. Ramidan, who had sat apart from us during these discussions quietly cutting the

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 83

leaves of a new French novel, now joined us and related some of her adventures in Egypt that bordered on the marvelous. She claimed to have evoked the elemental spirits in the King's Sepulcher of the Great Pyramid. She had a peculiar theory that the dog-headed and hawk-headed figures painted on the Egyptian monuments and tombs were not mere symbols, but real portraits of the elementals.

BOOK II
IN WHICH THE SPHINX IS
AROUSED

*“Love took up the harp of life and smote on
all the chords with might.”*

—TENNYSON.

CHAPTER VI

AN ideal existence followed my declaration of love to Isidaura Moberley. I seemed to be living in the seventh heaven of delight. Her character was a poetical revelation to me. I found her strongly imbued with that spirit of mysticism which has found its best expression in the verses of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and in the paintings of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Hers was a true, artistic appreciation of all that is beautiful, occult, and symbolic in art and literature. Pure and pallid as a lily, her blond hair forming a shimmering aureole about her head, her dainty figure garbed in clinging gowns of soft white material, encircled about the waist with a silver zone—she looked as if she had stepped from a sacred painting, limned in the dim cloisters of a medieval monastery by some monkish dreamer, whose brushes and colors were consecrated to the portrayal of saint and angel. Isidaura was not of this age of dry formalism and passionless utility, which ever seeks to

88 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

crush out the strivings of the soul after the divine life, to deny God and immortality, and all the exquisite and ineffable yearnings of virginal hearts for that peace which "passeth all understanding," for the "white silence" of the spirit. We cannot live by bread alone. After a materialistic science and philosophy have had their say; after the sacred College of Agnostics has placed its petrifying dictum upon human knowledge—"thus far thou shalt go and no farther"—the thoughtful soul to some solitude retires, there to brood upon the mysteries of creation, to draw new inspiration from founts of Faith and Hope.

The materialistic mind is too apt to see in its surroundings nothing more than the stone, the leaf and tree, the dull earth, the matter-of-fact sky, objects animate and inanimate; but the mystical soul beholds in the world of Nature symbols of exquisite beauty, life, an elusive spirit, half hidden, half revealed behind the mask of matter. Unhappy the man to whom that gracious soul of beauty is never manifested. The gorgeous sunset has no meaning for him, the dawn no inspiration, the procession of the seasons no significance. The painter, at once both painter and poet, puts upon canvas these subtle impressions of the

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 89

beauty and hidden meaning of things, which awaken similar emotions in others. The lowliest types of humankind, as in Millet's "Angelus" or "Sheepfold," when thus related to the boundless world of ideals which touch them unseen from every side, produce upon the beholder an effect of marvelous power. We seem to see the spirit struggling under its burden of flesh to be free; the plowed field expands into the Infinite; or we behold the resignation of the soul crushed beneath the iron law of caste, stunted and dwarfed. A great pity for humanity stirs in our hearts and overwhelms us with its intensity.

When we turn our faces from the luminous splendors of the spiritual life our souls become dead, frozen, and dark like a planet upon which no sun rays ever beat. The heart dries up like a stagnant pool into which no cooling waters flow. To cultivate the intellect alone, at the expense of the emotional, the religious nature, is to petrify the sense of the mystical, in music, poetry, and painting, leaving naught but the sensuous, which is death in life.

An unseen spiritual universe touches us on every side. To be oblivious to it does not disprove its reality, only that we are dead to our environment. In the words of the

Master, we have to be born again, to die to the old life of the sensuous, in order that we may be resurrected to the new life of the spirit, to the apprehension of God and the soul's eternal progress. In the mysteries of India, Egypt, and Greece was taught the preëxistence of the soul, and its final return, after many reincarnations, to the Father's House. In crypt, pagoda, pyramid, and temple this esoteric doctrine was whispered to the initiate, after he had served his long period of probation, or been tried by the fearful ordeals of fire, water, and air. Running like a thin vein of virgin gold through a gigantic mountain of quartz, the strange doctrine of eternal life has oozed through the mass of ancient superstition and modern skepticism, often lost sight of, only to reappear in some new and fantastic garb. Through the gates of death we are ushered into the knowledge of the soul's true being, and perhaps witness a tableau of our former lives floating before us like a wonderful phantasmagoria. We live over again the wonders of the long, long past.

Such was the delicate, spirituelle loveliness of Isidaura Moberley, the subtle, occult charm of her personality, that I felt at times that she

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 91

was not of this earth; that her true abiding place, even while in the flesh, was in a shadowy, crepuscular realm midway between this mortal life of ours and the world of spirit. Her footsteps were so soft and soundless that I scarcely realized at times that she was approaching me until I heard her speak. While waiting for her at our favorite trysting place—the quaint old garden—I frequently fell to musing upon what life had in store for me in the mysterious years that lay beyond. Then I would become conscious of a mystic presence near me; a low, sweet voice would murmur my name—“Henry!” Turning quickly I would behold Isidaura by my side, an exquisite smile illumining her white-rose face, the love-light shining from out her violet eyes.

Through all the vanished years I still see that perfect picture—Isidaura leaning upon the ancient sun-dial, the sunbeams playing upon her clustering curls, while round and about her the red-gold leaves of autumn silently fall upon the mossy carpet of the garden. This time of meeting she called “Love’s Hour,” because of the poet’s beautiful lines, so full of spiritual significance:

92 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

“ Stands it not by the door—
Love's Hour—’till she and I shall meet
With bodiless form and unapparent feet
That cast no shadow yet before,
Though round its head the dawn begins to pour
The breath that makes day sweet?—
Nay, why
Name the dead hours? I mind them well;
Their ghosts in many darkened doorways dwell
With desolate eyes to know them by.”

Frequently Isidaura and I paid visits to the seashore, which was at some little distance from the Hall. We strolled through the fishing hamlet of Portcummis, not far from which was located a dangerous reef about a quarter of a mile from shore—called from of old the “Jaws of Death.” Two huge masses of jagged rock stood up from out the sea, a menace to ships in stormy weather. The greenish water hissed and boiled about them angrily, throwing up clouds of spray every minute. It was a terrible sight to look upon. Here in times past was wrecked a Spanish galleon, one of the redoubtable Armada. Driven in upon the reef during a tempest, the great lumbering galleon got fixed between the “Jaws of Death” and was speedily ground to pieces. The few surviving Spanish sailors who managed to reach shore on floating spars

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 93

were massacred by the half-savage inhabitants of Portcummis, all except the captain of the vessel, who fought valiantly for his life, and was finally rescued by one of the Redcastles and held a willing prisoner at Wyndwood Hall. Eventually the Spaniard, who was in reality an Algerine renegade in the Spanish service, was transferred to the Tower of London, from which he was ransomed by his countrymen after the war was over. So ran the story. Tradition also said that the Algerine was secretly versed in magic and alchemy and revealed some important secrets, learned in the Orient, to his patron, Sir Davenant Redcastle. Charming tale; and charmingly told by Isidaura, while walking on the sands at Portcummis.

When the November weather set in, with its chilling fog and mist, and the drip, drip of the rain resounded somnolently upon the flagged terrace of Wyndwood Hall, Isidaura and I sat in the library and read together, or walked the portrait gallery for exercise. When evening closed in the entire household gathered in the long drawing-room. Captain Mainwaring still lingered at the Hall, going out daily on hunting expeditions accompanied by Ramidan. Hardly a day passed that he

did not persecute Isidaura with his attentions, pleading with her to fulfill the promise she had made to her mother. I wanted her to formally announce our engagement, but she begged to delay it for a few weeks. I had to acquiesce. I felt certain that Captain Mainwaring knew of my betrothal to Isidaura, but he did not so much as hint it to her. He acted toward me with the same cold indifference, the same careless insouciance that was so galling to me.

.

One day, when Isidaura was confined to her room with a slight cold, I walked to Stillwater to post a letter to America, to inform my parents of my engagement. I did not care to entrust my letter to the post-bag at the Hall, for I remembered Isidaura's warning, and the fate of some of her missives to Mr. Oldfield. On my return from Stillwater, through the dripping woods, for I took a roundabout route to the Hall, I happened near the ancient mausoleum of the Redcastles, which, as I have already noted, was also the burial place of Isidaura's father and mother. Life is a game of dice with Destiny. I chanced to cast a lucky number at this particular time, and my footsteps were directed to

the mausoleum. A sudden, furious storm of rain and wind coming up, I took refuge in the archway of the door of the tomb, with my back against the iron door which led into the little mortuary chapel. It was a somewhat lugubrious sanctuary against the weather, but the best the circumstances afforded. I thought to myself as I peeped through the grating of the portal, "What a farce existence is, if death be not a door leading into eternal life." While thus moralizing I was startled by footsteps crunching the gravel in front of the mausoleum. "Who could it be?" The sound of voices soon informed me that Ramadan and Captain Mainwaring were near. I climbed up into a niche in the side of the wall, and secreted myself behind a tall bronze urn. I was completely enveloped in shadow. I had no intention of spying upon the pair, but such was my dislike of them that I hid myself rather than come in contact with them. It was well I did so. They both entered the archway, and stood looking out at the rain. Ramadan was smoking his eternal Turkish cigarette.

"Beastly weather, this!" remarked Mainwaring, kicking the gravel savagely with the toe of his riding boot.

96 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

"It will let up in a few minutes," replied Ramadan calmly.

"And so you have said every day for the past two weeks," retorted Mainwaring in a surly tone, "but there has been nothing but rain, rain, rain all the time. A fine prophet you are. But what can one expect from the follower of a False Prophet!"

"Enough of that, Godfrey!" replied Ramadan hoarsely. "Have I not warned you time and again not to joke on that subject. Remember that walls have ears."

"True enough," said Mainwaring; "but *these* walls haven't. You forget this is a mausoleum. We are safe from spies and eavesdroppers in this place, unless you fear the dead can hear us."

"Dead men tell no tales!" said Ramadan. "But to business. You want more money."

"I do," answered the Captain. "I must have it, or I am ruined. I can't go the pace I've been going for the last six months without declaring myself a bankrupt. I lost heavily, you know, on the St. Leger. Those beastly horses of mine were completely outdistanced. I tried to recoup with the cards, but the cursed luck was against me. There is no hope for me except through a marriage with my cousin,

and she has struck her colors to that damned American adventurer. I might challenge him and kill him; you know my skill with sword and pistol. But after I have slain her lover, do you think Isidaura would marry me? Hardly so! What is to be done? You are damned clever at machinations! Can't you do something to aid me. You profess to be my friend."

There was a pause in the conversation. I inwardly thanked Mainwaring for his excellent opinion of me.

"Godfrey, I am disposed to assist you in your present predicament, as I have assisted you in the past. Have I not paid you well for the papers?"

"Hush!" exclaimed Mainwaring fearfully. "Don't speak of them."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Ramidan ironically. "Are *you* afraid the dead will hear you? Poor boy, you have completely lost your nerve of late. You tremble at shadows! Listen to me! Get me copies of those maps and plans which you say are locked up in the General-in-Chief's room, and I will supply all your monetary needs."

"How can you do that?" sneered Godfrey. "You confessed to me not an hour ago that

98 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

there was no more money to be squeezed out of that idiot, Colonel Moberley. Perchance, you have discovered the philosopher's stone, and propose turning all the pots and pans in the kitchen of Moberley Hall into solid gold. I defy you to do that, you old humbug, you! "

"A truce to your taunts, Godfrey Mainwaring," responded Ramadan. "Get me the plans I speak of, and you shall roll in money. Refuse, and——"

"What will you do? "

"Expose your treachery to the——"

"My God, man, you wouldn't do that? "

"I am capable of anything when aroused. I have no fear for myself. See here, Captain Godfrey Mainwaring, of Her Majesty's Household Guards, Confidential Secretary to the Commander-in-Chief, trusted employee of the War Office—I have borne a great deal from you of late, innuendoes, sneers, insults. I said nothing because I was extracting valuable information from you, but now it is my turn. You are in my power to make or break. Hound that you are, you shall lick my boots before I have finished with you."

I could not see the rage depicted upon Mainwaring's face, but his choked utterance,

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 99

his wild gestures, all betokened that his anger was at white heat. I was glad of this quarrel, because I hoped to obtain important revelations from them that would aid the cause of Isidaura. Mainwaring sprang at Ramadan like a tiger, as if to throttle him, but he was not quick enough. Ramadan had him by the wrists in a second, in a powerful grip. Godfrey, enervated with luxurious living and dissipation, writhed impotently in the grasp of the charlatan. The two men stood gazing at each other, breathing hard, and saying not a word. Presently Ramadan, whose anger seemed to have slipped from him like a garment, remarked in his former cool and collected tone of voice:

"Godfrey Mainwaring, you are making a fool of yourself. You provoked this quarrel; let it end here."

"You called me a *hound*," replied the Captain sullenly. "That is an insult I brook from no man."

"I sincerely beg your pardon, Godfrey. I did not mean it. I was stung to the quick by your repeated vilifications, and let my temper get the best of me. Pray, pardon me! Let us be friends. We have much at stake and cannot afford to be enemies."

"Very well, then," said Mainwaring; "let go of my wrists. You have a grasp of steel. I am willing to forgive and forget. We are too deeply involved to be at daggers drawn with each other. I promise to get copies of the documents you desire, the consideration to be five thousand pounds, which is the amount of my indebtedness."

"Ay, five thousand pounds and more," said Ramidan.

"Where is the money to be had?" asked Mainwaring curiously.

"Listen," replied Ramidan. "You are heir to Wyndwood Hall and the Kentish estate belonging to your cousin——"

"I am, in the event of her death without heirs. But as things now stand, my fair cousin is calculated to outlive me by many years. Worse than that, she will marry that American chemist—curse him for a fortune hunter and a cad!—then——"

"Suppose your cousin, Isidaura, were not so very robust! Suppose she were to *die*, and *soon*—ere this marriage could take place?"

"Great God, man! What do you mean?" whispered Godfrey, in a frightened voice.

"The rain has ceased!" remarked Ramidan, without answering the Captain's query.

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 101

"Let us away from this damp place. It sends a chill to my heart."

"And to mine!" replied Mainwaring. "I am no more in love with the spot than you are. Let us go."

In a moment they were gone. I heard their footsteps on the gravel walk, dying away in the distance.

I was overcome with terror at the vague hints of the charlatan. My brain reeled. What did he mean when he said, "*Suppose your cousin were not so very robust? Suppose she were to die, and soon?*"

The fact that Isidaura was in rather frail health added to my fears. Had Ramadan divined by some occult means that she was suffering from a mortal disease that threatened her life? Perhaps so! He had traveled much, seen much; and, if he were to be believed, had studied medicine in several European universities, besides having the strange pharmacopœia of the East at his fingers' ends. I determined to persuade Isidaura to go to London, there to consult with some eminent specialist regarding her health. That a dark plot, hatched in hell, was on foot directed against the well-being and happiness of my darling I did not at that time suspect. That

anyone should dream of injuring an innocent and lovely girl like Isidaura was beyond my comprehension.

"Isidaura dead!" I thought. "That sweet face metamorphosed into a waxen mask, unresponsive ever more to the smiles of life and love; that graceful form frozen into inert clay?" I could not bear to contemplate such a thing. Weird voices from out the blackness of that mausoleum seemed to echo my thought, crying in accents of woe, "Isidaura is dead! Isidaura is dead. Nevermore! nevermore shalt thou see her again!" Ghostly arms seemed to stretch forth to clasp her in their shadowy embrace, to claim her as the bride of the tomb. I hurried away from the place, as fast as I could, possessed with an unutterable horror.

I was not able to see Isidaura that evening, because of her indisposition, but I sent her a letter by the housekeeper.

Old Mrs. Brandon, in a little while, slipped a note from Isidaura into my hand. She wrote as follows:

"MY DEAREST HENRY:

"Your letter is full of extravagant fears for my health. Know then, you silly, silly

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 103

boy, that there is nothing the matter with me. From the tone of your missive, one would think that I was *in extremis*. I am only a little nervous, and have a bad cold. That is all! Now, good-night, my darling, and don't be oversolicitous about the health of

“Your ever loving

“ISIDAURA.”

That evening Ramadan and Captain Mainwaring made themselves especially agreeable. I was surprised at the guardsman's change of manner. He was even gracious to me. But I detected a suppressed excitement about him that struck me as peculiar, taking into consideration the fact that his habitual demeanor was of such a languid and lackadaisical character. He always seemed to be bored to death. There being no ladies present in the drawing-room except Mme. Ramadan, who was indifferent to all breaches of etiquette, Mainwaring sent Jennings for a bottle of the old Wyndwood brandy, and drank it freely, dashing it with the accustomed soda water. In his efforts to conciliate me and appear the *bon camarade*, he was evidently playing a part that was foreign to his nature. He did not succeed in impressing me. Rami-

dan was as effusively polite as of yore. Despite his charlatanry, he was a man of intellect. I could not help but admire his mental powers.

What were the plans and documents which Mainwaring was selling to him? That Ramidan was a political spy in the pay of some foreign government admitted of no doubt in my mind, after the revelation at the mausoleum. His nationality I was unable to divine, but I felt quite certain that he was no Armenian. He possessed none of the characteristics of the Armenian people such as I knew them. Whatever the country of his nativity, I came to the conclusion that he was in the secret service of the Russian Government, England's great rival in the East. His wife's Slavic origin lent color to this belief. There was no mistaking those Kalmuck features of hers.

I shall not forget that evening in the long drawing-room at Wyndwood Hall. Mme. Ramidan sat at a little table rolling cigarettes for her liege lord and master. She was as deft at this business as any Spaniard. Like many of her countrywomen, she did not disdain tobacco, but offered up incense frequently on the altar of the goddess Nicotine. She

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 105

puffed away at the little "white paper coffin-nails" with the greatest enjoyment, sending delicate rings of smoke curling gracefully in the air. Her gargantuan body was incased in a loose scarlet sacque, with a yellow silk dress richly embroidered with golden birds and flowers. She presented a grotesque and laughable appearance, reminding one of a Billingsgate fishwife suddenly elevated to the rank of an East Indian Begum, with but the remotest conception of the rôle which she was called upon to play in the human comedy. Her numerous rings scintillated in the light of the lamps. Squatting in a howdah upon the back of an elephant, and surrounded by a wild bodyguard of Sikh scimitar men, she would have commanded a certain amount of respect; but seated upon a sofa in an English drawing-room, she was as out of place as a Chinese idol in a Methodist meeting-house. Mme. Ramidan, with all her fraudulent pretenses to occultism and her cheap miracles, was not a bad woman at heart, as I subsequently discovered. But she was completely dominated by the powerful personality of her husband. He fascinated her like a serpent does a bird. She would have committed murder if he had so ordered it. Perhaps she was hypnotized.

106 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

Ramidan, as usual, wore the conventional evening dress. But on this particular occasion he treated us to a surprise in the shape of a decoration—the Order of the Crescent of Turkey—suspended from a red ribbon about his vulture-like neck. . As Mme. Ramadan explained, it was one of the many chivalric and civil orders which he had received during his career. I wondered what services rendered to Turkey had gained him the coveted Oriental Order of the Crescent. Maybe he had assumed it without authority. Many foreign charlatans, as I knew, were in the habit of displaying chivalric decorations to which they were not entitled. Cagliostro set the fashion in this regard.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN I had the supreme pleasure of seeing Isidaura again I expressed such anxiety about her health that she consented to have a talk with Dr. Jeffreys, the family physician, the next time he paid a visit to her uncle, who was now a chronic invalid. This consultation took place the following day. Dr. Jeffreys, a genial practitioner of the old school, declared that there was nothing the matter with Isidaura except that she was a trifle nervous.

I followed him to his carriage, and begged him to give me his unreserved opinion of the case.

"Imagination—too much imagination!" he said, placing his fat forefinger upon his expansive forehead to emphasize his remark. "Miss Moberley lives upon emotions. Being delicately organized and hypersensitive, she is apt to suffer from overwrought nerves. Is she taking part in any of Colonel Moberley's nonsense?—ahem! I beg pardon, I mean occult séances?"

108 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

I answered in the negative.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that," he replied. "I have given her a soothing draught to be taken twice a day—morning and evening. This ought to relieve her neurasthenic condition, provided she obeys me, and does not excite herself in any way. She has positively no organic disease."

I thanked him heartily for his expression of opinion in the case.

The kind old doctor eyed me curiously while I gave vent to my feelings. He seemed to say, as he shook my hand: "Sir, you are in love with my fair patient. Take care that *you* do not require the services of a doctor to patch up your wounded heart."

I did not tell Isidaura of my adventure at the mausoleum. It would only have worried her unnecessarily. I intended biding my time. However, I kept my eyes and ears open as regards the movements of Ramidan and his *fidus achates*, Captain Mainwaring. At the first opportunity I proposed visiting London and instituting inquiries regarding Mainwaring's status at the War Office. All I desired was to secure a weapon with which to fight the plotters in case of need. I was actuated by no patriotic motives, for I was not an

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 109

Englishman, nor a particular lover of Great Britain's imperial policy.

Nothing of a suspicious nature occurred at Wyndwood Hall at this period. But I was rather surprised one day at dinner to hear Mainwaring speak of purchasing or leasing a steam yacht in which to visit the Mediterranean. Ramadan bit his lips, frowned heavily, and did his best to direct the conversation into other channels, but his efforts were useless. The elegant guardsman had imbibed a trifle too much wine, and rattled on unceasingly. He remarked to Isidaura:

"Cousin, you don't look very robust. It is this beastly English climate that is affecting your health. What do you say to a trip to the Orient in a steam yacht? Your uncle and Mrs. Brandon could go with you."

"Thank you, Godfrey," replied Isidaura. "The climate of Sussex suits me very well. My health is not so bad as you think. I don't like steam yachts."

She gave me a little look that meant worlds to me. This ended the conversation, but it set me to thinking. Was the story about the steam yacht merely a piece of bravado, a covert insult intended for me, or did it have any basis in fact? The dark looks of Ramadan

110 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

when the subject was broached by Mainwaring came to my mind. Possibly the charlatan and his wife were on the eve of winging their flight to parts unknown, after having obtained all possible information regarding England's armament, etc.

"For what foreign government is Ramadan acting?" I asked myself. Some light was thrown on this dark problem by the unexpected arrival of a visitor to Wyndwood Hall, in the person of Mr. Melton Frothingham, a traveler, Egyptologist, and Oriental scholar. Mr. Frothingham and Colonel Moberley were old friends, having met each other in India. Frothingham had started life as one of Her Britannic Majesty's Civil Servants, holding an important post in the Province of Bengal. He rose to eminence and married the daughter of a wealthy Begum. On the death of his wife he resigned from the Government service and devoted his time to traveling in strange countries. He spoke a number of Oriental languages fluently. Tall, gaunt, and brown as a berry, he was the typical explorer, brave, fearless, and fertile in resources. He had hunted tigers in the jungles of India, lions in the wilds of Africa, and potted the grizzly in the Rocky Moun-

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 111

tains of America. Hunting wild beasts was but a secondary consideration with him; hunting human beings, not to slay, but for scientific reasons, was his chief amusement, believing with Pope that the greatest study of mankind is man. He was a welcome guest at Wyndwood Hall, and everything was done to make his visit a pleasant one. Many years had passed since he had seen his old comrade, Colonel Moberley.

Isidaura had met him when she was a little girl, but scarcely remembered him. He was a most interesting personality—a charming *raconteur*, with a fund of stories of Eastern travel to regale us at the fireside. He seemed to take a special fancy to me, because of my resemblance to a younger brother of his, who was killed in one of the wild campaigns on the borders of Afghanistan. Colonel Moberley received the friend of his youth with a right royal welcome. It was a delightful sight to witness the two cronies exchanging ancient confidences of Anglo-Indian life. Frothingham was much the younger of the two, and was remarkably well preserved. His nose was like an eagle's beak, his eyes gray and penetrating. His hair was snow white, and made him look much older than he really

was. His erect, muscular body, inured to hardships of jungle and desert, betokened a life full of energy—a fit tenement for a dauntless soul to inhabit. In the presence of Ramadan he was very reticent, having little or nothing to say. He would fix his piercing eyes, surmounted with their shaggy white brows, intently upon the charlatan, as if he would read his very soul. He took pleasure in conversing with Isidaura and myself. The day before his departure from the Hall he strolled into the garden with us. He spoke about his interviews with Colonel Moberley, and how he regretted seeing his old friend immersed in the fantastic madness of alchemy.

“Worse than that,” he remarked, “Colonel Moberley is in the clutches of one of the most remarkable impostors the world has ever seen; a very dangerous man, too. I would as soon think of entertaining a tiger as that fellow. I recognized Ramadan as soon as I set my eyes on him. In the year 18—he and his so-called wife were at the head of an occult society at Cairo, the purpose of which was the study of ancient Egyptian theurgy and magic, astrology, alchemy, etc. He pretended to be a reincarnation of Amasis, a hierophant of the temple of Pthah at

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 113

Memphis, and announced himself to be an adept who had the power of evoking the elementals. Both himself and wife declared that they remembered their former incarnations. He collected a large fund from a circle of rich European dupes to found a college for the study of the mysteries and the lost knowledge of the temples."

Mr. Frothingham paused, listened intently, and motioned us to be silent. I heard nothing save the dropping of dead leaves about us.

"Do go on, Mr. Frothingham," said Isidaura, intensely interested in his recital.

"You do not have serpents in the woods of Wyndwood Hall?" he whispered.

"I have never heard of any," laughed Isidaura.

"Think a minute!" he exclaimed. "A crawling, slimy beast, known to scholars as the *Genus delator*, or informer?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Isidaura excitedly, clinging to my arm.

"I will show one to you!" cried Frothingham, springing to his feet and dashing into the underbrush. He came back, holding by the nape of his neck the tiny Arabian servant Baba, who had crawled on his belly very near to us, in order to listen to our conversation.

114 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

Contemptible little spy! Frothingham gave him a kick and sent him wailing home to his master and mistress.

"*You do have serpents at Wyndwood Hall!*" said the traveler with peculiar emphasis, and a twinkling of his eyes, as he calmly lighted a cigar and puffed away.

"Alas, it seems so!" replied Isidaura sadly. "How you detected the fellow is a mystery to me. I heard nothing suspicious."

"Nor I!" I exclaimed.

"My dear young friends," said Frothingham, smiling, "after years of camping in the jungle one's auditory nerves grow wonderfully sensitive."

"Judging from what I have just witnessed they certainly must," remarked Isidaura. "But how you frightened the little monkey! I thought he would have a spasm!"

"Served him right," I said. "But do go on, Mr. Frothingham, and tell us about Ramadan."

"Well," said he, lowering his voice, "no sooner had the charlatan gotten possession of the money intended for the College of Mysteries than he disappeared with his wife, bag and baggage. Rumor had it that he had gone

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 115

to join the Mahdi, who had just raised the standard of revolt in the Soudan."

"Joined the Mahdi!" I echoed breathlessly, for I recalled to mind how Mainwaring had taunted Ramidan with being a follower of a *false prophet*. Light seemed to be breaking.

"Yes, the Mahdi," returned Mr. Frothingham. "Do you think it is so strange, Mr. Travers? I do not. Ramidan is undoubtedly a Mohammedan, and a follower of the Mahdi. I think I can prove it. Let me proceed with my story, and you will see. There are numbers of secret societies among the Mohammedans of Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria, the ostensible purpose of which is to preach a holy war against Christian nations and drive Christian usurpers from the land. One of these fraternities is called the Brotherhood of the White Bournous, with headquarters at Keirwan, the sacred city of Morocco. This Arabian Freemasonry has affiliations throughout the East. It is especially strong in Egypt at present. How do I know all this? Because I am a member. I was initiated into the order during a visit to Mecca some years ago. No one in the East suspects my nationality, for I speak Arabic fluently and my dis-

116 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

guises are perfect. You must not reveal my secret. It might endanger my life. I have no particular desire to have a yataghan stuck between my shoulders—at least, just at present; not until I have seen more of the world.”

We gave him our promise, and he continued solemnly: “A year ago last August I was at Khartoum. The Mahdi was there, surrounded by his followers. There was a meeting of the Brotherhood of the White Bournous one night, held in a dilapidated mosque. I was present. We squatted upon stone benches arranged along the walls. Upon a raised dais at one end of the hall sat the Mokaddem, one of the chiefs of the order. Each one of us had his face covered with the cowl of his bournous. It was impossible to recognize any of the brothers. A searching examination was given each member in the ante-chamber before he was admitted into the lodge—for lodge it was, as rigid in the scrutiny of credentials, the exacting of passwords, grips, and tokens, as any Masonic fraternity in conclave. After certain preliminary rites peculiar to the order were gone through with, during which every member had to reveal his identity privately to the chief, reports were made upon the state of Egypt and the pro-

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 117

jected holy war. At the close of the session the Mokaddem, rising to his feet, read four names from a scroll of parchment. As each name was called—a fictitious one, be it remembered—the individual answering to the cognomen approached the dais and prostrated himself before the Mokaddem. It was a weird and romantic scene. The lamps suspended from the roof of the mosque flared with a spectral light. The white-robed brothers had the appearance of corpses swathed in winding sheets, fixed in rows about the walls of a charnel house. In front of the chief upon a low altar was an open Koran, and resting upon it a human skull transfixed with a dagger.

“ ‘Brothers,’ cried the Mokaddem to the Arabs at his feet, extending his hands over them, ‘arise and gird up your loins for a long journey. Take staff and wallet. Do not delay! The Mahdi sends you his blessing. Go you to the South, and you to the North, and you to the East, and you to the West! Be wise as serpents! Forget not the faith. May Allah protect you! Death to the enemies of the Prophet!’

“ ‘*Death* to the enemies of the Prophet!’ exclaimed the whole assemblage.

118 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

"He then presented a naked sword to them, which they devoutly kissed, taking a fearful oath to be true to their trust, and evoking the vengeance of Heaven and the daggers of the Brotherhood against the traitor to the cause. Each one of the four Brothers saluted, and passed out of the hall amid the complete silence of the members. It was a solemn and dramatic occasion. As the last one was about to withdraw, he stumbled at the door. 'A bad omen,' muttered a gaunt Arab next to me. His cowl fell back from his face. The lamplight illumined his pale visage. I recognized the charlatan of Cairo—Ramidan. I was startled beyond expression. He quickly recovered himself and was gone in a moment. Judge of my surprise when I met him face to face at Wyndwood Hall, above all other places."

"Strange," I said; "but you may have been mistaken about Ramidan. The room was dimly lighted, the——"

"I never make mistakes," answered the imperturbable Frothingham. "I have gotten beyond that stage."

As this was an unanswerable argument, I said nothing.

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 119

Isidaura listened to the story with awe and amazement depicted upon her fair face.

"It looks very much as if Ramidan were in England for no good purpose," said Mr. Frothingham.

"What do you advise, Mr. Frothingham?" asked Isidaura.

"Get rid of the charlatan as soon as you can," he answered. "I might tell my story to the people at the War Office, but I am afraid that they would not believe me. I have no corroborative evidence to offer. Ramidan has done nothing to warrant his arrest in England that I know of. He is undoubtedly a spy, but how can I positively prove it?"

"How long are you to remain in England?" I inquired.

"A month or more," he responded. "My address is the Cosmopolitan Club, London."

"Perhaps I can assist you in unmasking Ramidan," I continued. "Wait until you hear from me before taking any steps in the matter."

He promised to comply with my wishes.

The following evening Mr. Frothingham

was *en route* for London, leaving Isidaura and myself sorely troubled over the revelations made to us. How to oust the Ramidans from Wyndwood Hall was the question. Isidaura did not want to anger her uncle.

Two weeks slipped away. I noticed a strange change in Isidaura. She seemed to be slowly fading away. A hectic flush suffused her cheeks, her eyes glowed with an unwonted brilliancy; her former elasticity of manner, her charming vivacity, were succeeded by a complete listlessness. She cared no longer to ride, walk, or read, but sat most of the time in a great armchair in the library, looking out upon the dripping woods. An utter weariness had taken possession of her. When I spoke to her concerning her health, she faintly smiled, but said hardly anything. Dr. Jeffreys called frequently, but seemed puzzled at his patient's condition. He still insisted, however, on his first diagnosis—that she was suffering from a functional nervous attack. I begged him to withhold nothing from me. I suggested that she might be the victim of that dread destroyer, consumption, which always hangs out its crimson oriflamme upon the cheek.

"My dear Travers," said the physician,

"there is not the slightest evidence of lung trouble. Of that you may rest assured."

My engagement to Isidaura was announced at this time. Good wishes for the future poured in upon us. Ramadan and Mainwaring lavished the most fulsome congratulations upon us. When it became known that I was no fortune-hunter, but was rich in my own name, the attitude of everyone underwent a surprising change. Old Colonel Moberley, influenced possibly by the thought of prospective dollars, was delighted to hear of my betrothal to his niece, and talked of visiting America. But I had won the heart of my sweet Isidaura, quite like the prince in the fairy story, who disguised himself as a beggar. I was as sure of her devotion and love as she was of mine. To behold her slipping away from me slowly, slowly, and I powerless to prevent it, made my heart bleed. Not content with the opinions of Dr. Jeffreys and his fellow-practitioners of Stillwater, I sent to London to secure the advice of eminent medical men like Sir Joseph L. and others, but their opinions only confirmed that of the family physician.

"It is a very peculiar case of neurasthenia," said Sir Joseph L. "I can find no evidence

122 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

of organic disease, yet the vital forces seem to be slowly withdrawing. Miss Moberley is in a very precarious condition. She does not suffer any, save from a mortal weakness. It is this weakness wherein lies the great danger. You have seen a candle slowly burn to its socket? Well, that is the way her life will go out."

CHAPTER VIII

THE days dragged on their weary length; there was a slight change for the better in Isidaura. Captain Mainwaring went away to London, promising to return for the Christmas holidays. The Ramidans kept to themselves, partly from choice, partly because I did not encourage their attempts to ingratiate themselves with me. Isidaura had manifested such an absolute repugnance to their society that they carefully avoided the library, where she held court during the day. In a jesting way, she called me her Prime Minister. I read to her, conversed with her, and watched over her while she slept in the great armchair before the fireplace. Mrs. Brandon was now regularly installed as Isidaura's nurse. Her duties as housekeeper were transferred temporarily to one of the under maids, a very reliable woman. Everything that Isidaura ate and drank was carefully prepared by Mrs. Brandon, who proved to be an admirable at-

tendant on a sick-room. I was delighted at the improvement in Isidaura's condition. It was very slight, but encouraging nevertheless, and so thought Dr. Jeffreys, who came twice a day to the Hall to prescribe for his patient.

Isidaura was much interested in the London papers at this time. The heroic Gordon was at Khartoum, holding his own against the fanatical hordes of the Mahdi, but his situation was critical in the extreme. A vacillating British ministry was discussing the advisability of sending an army into Egypt for the rescue of Gordon and the relief of Khartoum. War clouds were looming up black and ominous upon the Eastern horizon. Public sentiment was in favor of an immediate dispatch of an army to Egypt, but the War Office procrastinated, with the result recorded by history—the sacrifice of that noble and courageous soul, the lion-hearted Gordon, soldier, ruler, and Christian gentleman.

Frequently Isidaura would say to me: "Do you really suppose that M. Ramidan is a political spy, an emissary of the Mahdi? It sounds so improbable, that story of Mr. Frothingham. Upon whom has he spied and when? To my certain knowledge he has

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 125

never left Wyndwood Hall but twice since his residence here. I dislike and fear the man from the bottom of my heart, but I do not believe him guilty of being a spy. How terrible it would be if such proved the case! To think of Wyndwood Hall, whose proprietors have ever been noted for their loyalty, harboring such a creature as a spy. Mr. Frothingham was romancing, or else mistaken about seeing Ramidan in the camp of the Mahdi."

"Ramidan speaks Arabic fluently," I suggested.

"True," answered Isidaura. "But so does Mr. Frothingham. Ramidan's familiarity with the Arabic language does not make him an Arabian. No, no! The story savors too much of the Arabian Nights. Mr. Frothingham must have dreamed it. I hope and pray that he will not publicly give vent to his vague suspicions about Ramidan. Just imagine the scandal and newspaper notoriety that would ensue. I, for one, would die with shame."

"Mr. Frothingham," I said, "has promised not to take any steps in the matter until he has consulted with me. Rest assured, dearest, that there will be no denunciations

until documentary or very strong circumstantial proof is forthcoming."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Henry. I feel that the honor of Wyndwood Hall is safe in your hands," she replied.

I did not tell her what I knew about her cousin, Captain Mainwaring. I hesitated to overwhelm the family with disgrace by such disclosures. Again, I reasoned: what real proof had I that Mainwaring was selling state secrets to Ramadan? None. Suppose I revealed the conversation I had overheard at the mausoleum, and my statements were denied by the confederates as false and malicious fabrications? What then? My position would be most unenviable. I had no documents rescued from the hands of Ramadan with which to support my charges. Clearly I would render myself liable to a prosecution for criminal libel. Mainwaring had powerful friends at court, otherwise he could not have obtained his important position at the War Office. He doubtless had cleverly covered up his tracks. Though morally certain of the guilt of Mainwaring and Ramadan, I possessed no overt evidence of it. In my heart of hearts I fully believed that Frothingham's story was correct: Ramadan was an

emissary of the Mahdi, sent to England to study the diplomatic chess-board, to watch the movements of the War Office, to report upon the intention of the British Government, and obtain plans, etc., of any prospective campaigns. The conversation overheard by me at the mausoleum corroborated Mr. Frothingham's suspicions, and revealed the political status of Ramadan. Had I been an Englishman, I probably would have sacrificed Wyndwood Hall upon the altar of patriotism, and run the risk of a suit for libel. At all events, I probably would have secretly informed the authorities of Downing Street of all the circumstances of the case. As matters turned out, it would have been better for Isidaura had I pursued the above course, and rid Wyndwood Hall forever of the incubi that had settled upon it. But Fate had decreed otherwise.

Dr. Jeffreys, devoted old friend and counselor, was innocently responsible for the sad events that followed so swiftly upon the departure of Captain Mainwaring from the Hall.

"Miss Isidaura is considerably improved, Mr. Travers," said the doctor to me one morning, "but I do not like the location of

128 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

her bedroom. It faces the east, and is exposed to the wintry winds. It would be better for her to be moved to a room with a southern exposure at once."

I consulted Mrs. Brandon about the matter, and she replied:

"Very good, sir! I will take charge of the removal immediately. The best room in the Hall with a southern exposure is the state bedroom, called, as you know, 'Prince Rupert's Room.' It is centrally located and very convenient. Besides that, it has a small cabinet communicating with it where I can sleep."

I thanked her, and she went off to give directions to the under-servants to arrange the apartment for her young mistress.

Isidaura looked thoughtful when I told her about it.

"I don't like the state bedroom, Henry," she said. "I am not superstitious, as you know, but I have never willingly occupied 'Prince Rupert's Room'; not that I am afraid of being haunted by the ghost of the gallant cavalier, but an undefinable feeling of fear, a sense of impending evil, always possesses me whenever I enter the apartment. It is silly of me, I know, but——" And here she stopped to quote Rossetti's strange lines:

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 129

"May not this ancient room thou sit'st in dwell
In separate living souls for joy or pain?
Nay, all its corners may be painted plain
Where Heaven shows pictures of some life spent
well;
And may be stamped a memory all in vain,
Upon the sight of lidless eyes in Hell."

"Well, dearest," I replied, "we will fix up some other room for you."

"Oh, no, no!" she exclaimed. "Mrs. Brandon is unquestionably right. Prince Rupert's Room is the best located, the most convenient one in the Hall. I shall endeavor to overcome my repugnance, my childish dislike, and occupy the chamber. Say no more about it, that's a dear."

The upshot of it was that Isidaura was installed in the ancient-tapestried chamber wherein I had lodged the night of my arrival at Wyndwood Hall. I remembered my dream about the idol, and was possessed with a vague feeling of uneasiness about the apartment. But this I shook off as unworthy of a normal mind—a scientific man. Coming events cast their shadows before. The shadow of the hideous catastrophe that was to overwhelm Wyndwood Hall and separate me from my darling lay athwart my path, yet I

130 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

was blind to the premonition conveyed by it. Isidaura, who had a dim prescience of the impending danger, neglected the warning, and played directly into the hands of the villains. She wished to show me that she was not influenced by superstitious feelings, and so occupied that fatal room, about which were woven so many strange and tragic stories. Why did I not yield to the prompting of my soul, and fly Wyndwood Hall with my beloved? Ah, why? I would have saved my heart many bitter pangs.

A week had scarcely flown ere Isidaura experienced a relapse. A profound lethargy weighed her down, soul and body. Each day she was carried to the library, and I watched by her side. Most of the time she slept. She suffered absolutely no pain. One morning she related the following curious experience:

"Henry," she began solemnly, "I have seen a ghost!"

"My poor darling," I replied, "it was but an illusion, a dream. Your health——"

She paid no attention to my effort to divert her attention, but continued: "It was toward morning. The moonlight was streaming into my room. I was aroused by the squeaking of a mouse behind the wainscoting. Parting

the curtains of the bed, I looked out. Standing near a little table, upon which is placed my medicines, I beheld a tall figure habited in the gray robe of a monk. The cowl was drawn down over its face. Suddenly it moved with noiseless tread toward me. I screamed with terror, and sank back upon the pillows, whereupon Mrs. Brandon came running into the room from the adjoining cabinet. When I informed her of what I had witnessed, she pooh-poohed the whole affair, declaring vehemently that it was a vision superinduced by the state of my health. She then proved to me positively that nobody could have entered the apartment, for the doors were tightly locked and barred, and there was no means of ingress by the windows, as they are directly over the moat and inaccessible—hence I was suffering from an hallucination of the senses."

"Mrs. Brandon is right," I answered.

"Henry," continued Isidaura sadly, "I don't believe I am long for this world."

"Oh, Isidaura," I cried, hardly able to keep back my tears, "don't say that! You will soon be well and strong."

"Henry," she replied, "I have never been superstitious; I have never in the past given credence to nursery tales of phantasmal ap-

132 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

pearances, but I must confess that my ideas on the subject have undergone a change. I beheld the shade of the cowed monk, which, according to the ancient legend of the house, portends disaster and death."

She shivered with fear and clung to me as if for protection against her foes of the unseen world. I endeavored to pacify her, but without avail. I then came to the conclusion that her nervous disorder had temporarily affected her brain. Poor girl, there were more horrors in store for her—it was necessary for her to traverse the valley of the shadow, to stand like the ancient initiates of the mysteries at the very portal of Proserpina. When I bade her good-night that evening she said to me in a low, mournful voice:

"Oh, Henry, what if I should never see you again this side of the grave?"

"Banish these gloomy forebodings, dearest!" I cried, kissing her lips and forehead. "All will be well with you. It is ever darkest before the dawn. Our dawn of life and love will soon break."

I carried her in my arms to the tapestried room, and resigned her to the charge of the faithful Brandon, who met me at the door.

"Guard my darling, Mrs. Brandon," I

said. "Do not leave her for an instant. Had you not better sit up all night and watch over her? She is excessively nervous."

Mrs. Brandon readily acquiesced, rolling a great leathern armchair toward the side of the canopied bed, the better to observe her patient. The little table containing the vials of medicine, etc., was moved in close proximity to the nurse's elbow. I gave one swift glance about the room as I retired. The eyes of the dashing cavalier, Prince Rupert, seemed to glare ominously at me from out of the picture. Upon the lips appeared a mocking smile, but that was doubtless due to the flickering firelight which played upon the face of the time-stained portrait.

I went down to the library, and sought to distract my mind from its perturbed fancies by perusing some of the books contained upon the worm-eaten book shelves, such as the "Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie," by Eliphas Levi, a quaint modern treatise on white magic, and a strange old work of the sixteenth century on "Vampires," by an unknown author. The latter was a most lugubrious production, the product of a wild and diseased imagination. The wind had died down to the faintest whisper. All was quiet in the

old mansion. I wondered what had become of the Ramidans. I had not had so much as a glimpse of them for several days, and never thought to inquire about them from the servants. The grand piano in the drawing-room had not been touched for a week or more, owing to Isidaura's illness. This must have worked a hardship on Ramidan, the master of melody, the lover of sweet harmonies. But now, suddenly, strangely, and without warning, the solemn silence was broken. I heard Ramidan playing softly upon the instrument, and the most inappropriate, maddest of selections, the "Funeral March of a Marionette." He evidently thought me in bed. What did he mean by such insolence? I jerked the bell cord savagely, whereupon the butler put in an appearance. He seemed to be much alarmed.

"Jennings!" I cried, "do you hear that noise?"

"What noise, Mr. Travers?"

"The piano, of course!"

"Yes—yes!" gasped the butler, his face very white, and his hands trembling violently.

"It is *he*—Ramidan!" I exclaimed angrily. "Go to him at once, Jennings, and tell him to stop playing that piano. Give him my compliments, and say that *I forbid it!*"

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 135

"Mr. Travers," replied Jennings, "I do not understand it at all. M. Ramidan and his wife went to London the day before yesterday. They have not returned. The house is bolted and barred. No one could possibly enter without the servants knowing it."

"And Baba, the Arabian servant?" I asked.

"Went with his master and mistress," was the reply. "Indeed, sir, I am puzzled beyond expression. But strange things have happened of late in this house. Hush! Listen!"

The music changed to a wild, barbaric melody, and finally died away.

"No earthly performer played that piano, sir," said the butler.

"Pooh, nonsense!" I exclaimed. "Come; I will show you. I will confront the man, and give him a piece of my mind. He has had strict injunctions not to open that instrument, much less play upon it."

Thoroughly in the mood for picking a quarrel with the detested Ramidan, I took up a candelabrum of wax lights and pushed my way through the apartments leading to the drawing-room, the butler following timidly in my wake. The drawing-room was un-

136 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

lighted, cold, and gloomy. The glare of the wax candles I carried revealed the fact that no one was at the piano, or in the apartment. I was indeed surprised and nonplused.

"There, sir; did I not tell you the music was not of mortal origin?" said the now thoroughly alarmed butler.

"Tell me, Jennings," I inquired emphatically, "what did you mean just now when you remarked: *Strange things have happened of late in this house?*"

"This, sir, if you please: the ghost of the cowled monk has been seen in the haunted wing of the building. The female servants, sir, are very much frightened, and talk of leaving in a body."

"Rank nonsense!" I cried. "But let them go, the superstitious cowards!"

"Indeed, sir, begging your pardon, but the stories are true. With my own eyes I saw a dancing blue flame in the laboratory window this very night."

"The laboratory is locked," I answered, "and I alone possess the key. Besides that, the door has been sealed with my private seal. I did this at the instance of Colonel Moberley, who is too sick to undertake his chemical studies."

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 137

"But I swear that I am not mistaken!" cried Jennings. "I saw the light; others have seen the monk's ghost, and now comes the spirit music."

"Ay," I sneeringly said; "spirit music, forsooth—the shade of a seventeenth century monk playing a modern air on the piano. This is too much! Human hands produced that music, Jennings—and those hands belonged to M. Ramadan. He is in the house."

"Impossible, Mr. Travers," faintly uttered the butler.

"We will go at once to the laboratory," I said, "and see if anyone has been there. If Ramadan has dared to break those seals, I'll——"

"Oh, Mr. Travers," interrupted Jennings, "please excuse me! I can't go to that room." So saying, he laid his withered hand upon my arm to deter me from my quest.

I shook him off roughly and left him in the hall, bewildered and perplexed.

"Ramadan may have departed two days ago for London," I said to myself, "but he has returned, and slipped into the mansion unknown to the domestics. I mean to investigate that occurrence in the laboratory."

I softly traversed the long, dark passages

138 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

of the house and ascended the narrow staircase leading up to the laboratory. The massive, iron-clamped oaken door of the abode of alchemy was tightly closed; the seals were intact. I listened attentively, and thought I heard a faint sigh within the room. I must own that for a moment my heart stood still. Was the place indeed haunted? Suddenly I heard a bottle fall upon the stone floor. I came to my senses at once. I tore away the seals from the door and thrust the key into the lock, but not without making a great noise. Throwing open the door, I entered, holding the candelabrum high over my head. I thought I saw a dark shadow melt into nothingness in one corner of the apartment; but that was all. The laboratory was empty. A broken vial lay on the floor near the furnace. After a careful examination of the place I was forced to the conclusion that no one had been there; the vial had probably been upset by a mouse. The sigh I heard was evidently the result of my overheated imagination. But how to account for the music in the drawing-room was what puzzled me. The more I thought of the matter the more nonplused I became. The Ramidans were not in the house. I went to their apartments, and had strict

search made throughout the building, but could discover no trace of them. I came to the conclusion that both the butler and myself were the victims of an auditory hallucination.

I did not go to bed that night, but slept in an armchair in the library. When morning broke gray and cold, I was aroused by a cry from upstairs.

I rushed from the library into the hall. There I met a group of frightened domestics.

"Come quickly, Mr. Travers—Jennings! Oh, God, she is dead!"

I sprang up the stairs like mad, and was met at the landing by Mrs. Brandon, who was wringing her hands and crying in the greatest distress.

"Dead!" I hoarsely echoed. "What do you mean?"

"Isidaura! Isidaura! my dear young mistress!" she wailed in an agony of grief.

I entered the tapestried chamber.

It was true. Isidaura was no more. She was lying calmly and peacefully in the carved ebony bed, her eyes wide open, but seeing nothing, her face like marble. After an ineffectual effort to recall her to life I fell in a swoon upon the floor. When I recovered my

senses I found myself lying upon a sofa in my own room, attended by Jennings. When I was calm enough to inquire about the facts of the awful visitation, I learned that Mrs. Brandon, after administering a dose of the prescribed medicine to Isidaura about midnight, had dozed off to sleep for a few minutes. When the clock struck the quarter, Isidaura grew restless again, whereupon Mrs. Brandon gave her another teaspoonful of the sleeping draught. When the sun rose Isidaura had passed away. She had evidently expired peacefully in the early watches of the morning. The shock to Mrs. Brandon was terrible as she drew back the curtains of the bed and beheld her young mistress a cold, inert corpse. I dispatched the groom, mounted upon the fleetest horse in the stable, for Dr. Jeffreys and other physicians in the vicinity; but, alas, it was too late. They could do nothing.

"In all my experience," said Dr. Jeffreys, "this is the strangest case I ever encountered."

About ten o'clock that morning the Ramidans arrived from London. They appeared to be deeply affected by the sad news of Isidaura's death.

BOOK III

**IN WHICH THE RIDDLE OF THE
SPHINX IS SOLVED**

*"Over those who dwelt in the shadow of
death, a bright light has risen."*

—OLD TESTAMENT.

CHAPTER IX

THE body of Isidaura lay in state in the old chapel of Wyndwood Hall. The coffin rested upon a high catafalque which was draped in black velvet. Wax lights stuck in silver sconces illumined the scene. The walls of the Gothic apartment were hung with funereal trappings of black and silver. All day long the carriages of the neighboring gentry rolled under the dark porte-cochère of the Hall. People who had not visited the place for years came to the funeral, some impelled by a morbid curiosity, others by a feeling of sympathy for old Colonel Moberley. The tenants of the estate showed genuine grief at the death of their fair young mistress. They stood in groups about the servants' hall, where food and drink had been provided for them, and discussed the affair with bated breath. They were to have a master over them now. Would he prove kind or cruel? Some of Isidaura's poor old pensioners drew tears to my eyes. They

looked so forlorn, feeble, and forsaken, as they gazed wistfully at me, as if to read their fate in my eyes. But I had nothing to tell them, no encouragement to offer them. With Isidaura's death, my status in the household was that of a mere guest, nothing more.

Mr. Oldfield and Mr. Frothingham came to the funeral. Captain Mainwaring appeared early on the scene, habited in mourning costume *à la mode*. He moved about silently among the company, paying particular attention to Mr. Oldfield, much to that gentleman's disgust—for disgust was plainly written upon the worthy lawyer's furrowed visage. Evidently he liked not the Captain, and the heir to the estate. The Ramidans kept discreetly in the background. I passed Ramadan once during the day. He gave me an obsequious bow. I imagined I detected a faint sneer of triumph on his bloodless face, but there was no time to resent it; my heart was too oppressed with grief to notice slights or insults. The funeral was at three o'clock in the afternoon. The service was that of the Church of England. I took one last look at the exquisite face of my beloved Isidaura. The casket was then placed in a sarcophagus of lead, which was deposited in the

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 145

ancient mausoleum. I was not present at this latter ceremony, because I fainted at the portal of the mortuary chamber, and was carried back to the Hall by Mr. Frothingham and some of the servants. I was ever of a nervous and highly organized temperament, and deeply felt the sorrow which had come upon me. Mr. Oldfield witnessed the placing of the seals upon the leaden sarcophagus, and then returned to the house. When I was sufficiently revived, I accompanied Mr. Frothingham to the library, where I found Mr. Oldfield and Colonel Moberley, the latter propped up in his invalid's chair, looking the picture of despair. We did our best to entertain each other, but grief weighed heavily on our souls. At midnight the valet came to take his master to bed. Poor old Colonel Moberley! His niece's death had struck him with a mortal wound. I wished to converse privately with Frothingham, but had no opportunity. Either Ramadan or his wife persisted in interrupting us by coming into the room to consult some book or other. The next morning after breakfast the entire household and tenantry assembled in the great picture gallery of the Hall. Mr. Oldfield made a short address, and then proceeded to read

the will of Isidaura's father, which passed the estate to Captain Mainwaring, Isidaura having died without heirs. It was merely a formality, as everyone knew by heart the provisions of the document.

On the conclusion of the reading M. Ramadan stepped to the front and warmly congratulated Mainwaring; then turning to the servants and tenants, he said:

"My dear friends, behold your new master, Captain Godfrey Mainwaring, whom you will soon learn to love for his many splendid qualities of head and heart. He has been a brave defender of his country's honor. [I wondered where; assuredly not in the clubs of London.] He is an English gentleman; a lover of rural life and sports. He will make the *beau ideal* of a landlord and a magistrate."

A feeble cheer went up from the assemblage, in which Mr. Oldfield, Mr. Frothingham, and myself did not join. Captain Mainwaring bit his lips with vexation and angrily slapped his riding boot with the whip which he carried. The scowl upon his brow betokened no good will toward the retainers of the estate. The half-hearted hurrahs of the luckless domestics and tenants were too ap-

parent. Evidently the Captain's reputation as a *gentleman* was very well known throughout the country. There was no discounting that fact. But he made no remarks at the time, simply contenting himself with bowing right and left, in a cold, formal way. After the tenants had been regaled with wine and cakes, they left the house. Mr. Oldfield asked about my plans for the future, but I had none, consequently could give him but little satisfaction. I went about in a dazed sort of manner, as if in a dream. At noon the lawyer went back to London with Mr. Frothingham. I accompanied them to the station. While waiting for the train, Mr. Frothingham, taking me aside, remarked:

"My dear young friend, have you been following the newspapers of late?"

"No," I replied. "I have not read a paper for a week. I know absolutely nothing about what is transpiring in the world."

"The War Office has taken fire at last. The troop-ships sail for Egypt in a week's time with an army for the relief of Khartoum."

"Thank God for that!" I exclaimed.

"Is it not time to move against that fellow

148 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

Mainwaring and his copartner in guilt? I have waited these many days for a signal from you."

"I dared not give it," I said.

"Travers, I appreciate your loyalty to the House of Moberley. Perhaps I should have done the same in your place. Listen! The fact has been discovered at the War Office that the plans of mobilization, armament, etc., have been tampered with by a traitor. The authorities are endeavoring to keep the matter a profound secret, but it has leaked out somehow or other at the military club. They are trying to hush the affair up, in the endeavor to discover the villain. I found it out. No matter how. Now is the time to put the machinery in motion that will lead to the arrest of Ramadan and Mainwaring. You must come forward and give the clue; the facts in your possession. Mainwaring and Ramadan must be watched by detectives both here and in London."

"I fully agree with you," I said. "Warn the War Office, and wire me when you want me. I shall be on hand."

At that moment the train came puffing into the station, and I bade my friends good-by.

Gloomy was the walk back from Stillwater. The sky was gray and somber. The wind whistled mournfully through the branches of the giant oaks that lined the winding avenue leading up to Wyndwood Hall. It sounded to me like a *miserere* reverberating among the groined arches of some old Gothic cathedral. And how like unto a Gothic interior is an avenue of ancient oak trees.

"Oh, House of the Sphinx; inscrutable, dark!" I cried aloud, shaking my clenched hand at the building; "shall I ever unravel your damnable riddle!"

That I was on the very eve of its solution I did not at the moment realize.

I was met at the door by the butler, who said to me:

"Mr. Travers, Captain Mainwaring desires to see you at once in the library." Then looking cautiously about him, he continued: "My dear sir, will you—will you believe me to be your friend now and always. I am an old man, fast sinking into the grave. I had hoped to die in the service of the Moberleys, but, alas, I fear——"

"What do you fear, Jennings?"

"I think, sir, that he—the Captain—will dispense with my services soon. It is ru-

mored that he means to give the butler's place to a younger man, his valet."

"Oh, I hope not!" I said, pressing the faithful servitor's hand.

"It is talked of in the servants' hall, sir. Would it be asking too much of you to say a good word for me to the Captain?"

"I will do what I can," I said. I passed into the library, where I found Captain Mainwaring and M. Ramidan. Upon the table was a decanter of brandy. Mainwaring had evidently been indulging in deep potations. He looked flushed and angry. The face of Ramidan was as cold and impassive as ever. Mme. Ramidan sat apart, feeding lumps of sugar to a pet macaw, a horrible bird, whose discordant screeching had often annoyed me in the past, as it seemed to be now annoying Mainwaring.

"Damn that bird!" I heard him mutter. "I'll wring its beastly neck if it doesn't keep quiet."

"Oh, Captain Mainwaring!" ejaculated Ramidan's offended spouse. "How can you be so cruel as to want to injure my poor, dear pet."

She pressed the macaw's green head fondly to her lips, and jabbered phrases of

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 151

affection in the Russian language over it. The bird continued its harsh cries. At a slight sign from her husband, Mme. Ramidan arose, made me an obeisance, and swept out of the apartment with her feathered pet perched upon her fat forefinger. The macaw manifested its love for its mistress by clawing and pecking viciously at her diamond rings.

"You desire to speak to me, Captain Mainwaring," I remarked.

"Yes," sneered Mainwaring, and slowly measuring his words, he asked: "I wish to inquire, sir, how long you propose burdening the Hall with your presence. Some time has elapsed since the funeral, and you still are here. Colonel Moberley's alchemical studies are at an end, and he needs your services no longer, yet you——"

"Captain Mainwaring," I returned hotly, "scarcely a day has gone by since Miss Moberley's death. I have had little or no time to pack my trunks, but I shall relieve you of my presence immediately."

"See that you do," he answered contemptuously. "We have had enough of Yankee adventurers here."

"Godfrey! Godfrey!" was Ramidan's warning cry.

152 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

Mainwaring had risen from his chair, and was pointing to the door.

"You hound!" I cried, my heart filled with rage and hate. Springing at him like a tiger, I felled him to the floor with a single blow. Ramadan, alarmed, sprang between us. The Captain lay stunned for a minute, and then staggered to his feet, shrieking like a madman. He would have closed with me had not Ramadan held him about the body. He could not release himself from the powerful grasp of the charlatan, and so frothed at the mouth and hurled ineffectual epithets at me.

"I shall have your life for this!" he howled.

"You are welcome to it," I replied, "but you must take it by legitimate means."

"Then you will fight a duel?" he asked, calming down somewhat, a triumphant gleam in his eyes.

"Americans are never backward in defending their honor!" I said.

"Good!" he snarled. "You have something of the gentleman in your blood after all. I had hitherto imagined that all Yankees were too much steeped in commercialism to risk their hides in honorable combat. I am

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 153

delighted to meet with an exception to the rule. When shall the meeting take place?"

"Whenever you please," I returned.

"M. Ramadan, who will act as my second, will call upon you as soon as possible."

"I shall be charmed to arrange matters with him!" I answered ironically. "My residence for the next week or so will be at the Moberley Arms in the village."

"Thank you, sir," said the Captain, giving me a frigid bow.

I returned his salutation with equal punctiliousness and coldness.

"You idiot!" I heard Ramadan whisper in Mainwaring's ear.

"And now, gentlemen," I said, with mock deference, "*au revoir!*"

I went to my room and speedily packed my trunks. Leaving word with Jennings to send the luggage to the Moberley Arms, I made ready to leave the house. As I was putting on my overcoat in the hallway I could hear the sound of altercation in the library. Mainwaring and Ramadan were evidently at it, hammer and tongs. I was about opening the front door when a hand was laid on my arm. Turning, I beheld the frightened face of Mme. Ramadan. She looked haggard and

wan. Her dull eyes were bloodshot. Her frowsy mop of yellow hair was more unkempt than ever.

"Mr. Travers," she said softly.

"Well," I answered laconically, with undisguised dislike.

"Are you going to fight a duel with him?"

"I am!"

"My God! and with pistols?"

"I shall certainly select those weapons, being the challenged party."

"*Then he is lost!* He is a wretched shot with a pistol, but a superb swordsman. You Americans, I understand, are accustomed to firearms from boyhood. My God! My God! why did we ever come here?" She wailed and wrung her fat hands in despair.

I could not help smiling at the woman's absurd exhibition of misplaced woe. She thought I was going to fight with her husband. When I assured her that she was mistaken, and that my quarrel was with Mainwaring, her tears changed to smiles.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Travers, for telling me this! Baba, my servant, overheard the conversation in the library——"

"His ear being at the keyhole, where it exactly fits," I interjected.

"Well, yes, if you will; he was eavesdropping. I cannot break him of the evil habit. He doesn't understand English any too well, and brought me a garbled account of what was transpiring. Mr. Travers, you are going to leave Wyndwood Hall forever?"

"I am."

"Will you believe me when I say that I esteem and honor you. You have my deepest sympathy in your recent bereavement. But, my dear sir, time heals all wounds. You will go home to your people, and in the flight of years the death of your betrothed will become as a dream to you. There will be an end of poignant sorrow."

"Never!" I said. "My heart is buried with Isidaura. Never, never, shall I forget her. Life is nothing to me now. I care not how soon I go to join her in the grave."

"Mr. Travers, I pity you from the bottom of my heart. Good-by! Good-by!"

I bade her good-by and left the place. I engaged a comfortable room at the Moberley Arms at Stillwater.

The next morning while I was at the breakfast table mine host came to announce that a foreign gentleman from the Hall had called

156 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

to see me. He handed me a card, edged with black, which read as follows:

M. ASAKOFF RAMIDAN,
Knight Commander of the Order of the
Crescent of Turkey,
Member of the Exploration Society of
Asia Minor,
Graduate of the University of Hermetic
Sciences of Paris,
Fellow of the Theosophical Society of
Bombay, India,
and
Past Grand Master of the Isis and Osiris
Rite of Egyptian Freemasonry, etc.

This pompous array of titles made me smile, especially the pseudo-university of hermetic sciences. Tearing the card into little bits, I said to the landlord:

"Admit the gentleman."

The host, with effusive bows, presently ushered into the room the modern Apollonius of Tyana. Ramidan held out his hand to me in the most cordial manner, but I took no notice of it. I stood up, coldly polite and severe.

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 157

"M. Ramidan," I said, "a truce to meaningless civilities. We understand each other. Let us come to business at once. I regret to say that I have as yet secured no second. I imagine that it will be a difficult matter to get a gentleman to represent me in this affair. Englishmen are adverse to fighting duels. It is, as you know, against the laws of the country. But there is no reason why we should not fight in France. A fishing smack can land us in a few hours at Boulogne, and then——"

"Tut, tut! my dear young friend," said Ramidan, smiling benignantly. "Why such sanguinary talk? Who wants to fight a duel?"

"Explain yourself," I said, "and don't talk in riddles. Has your principal turned coward?"

"Listen to me, Mr. Travers," he said. "I come not to bring a challenge, but to act as a peacemaker. I am a dove bearing an olive branch."

"More like a raven," I thought, "bringing prognostications of evil." But I did not give vent to this sentiment, contenting myself with a laconic "Ahem!" and a contemptuous smile.

"Captain Mainwaring," continued the

158 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

charlatan, "is no coward, believe me. Up until two hours ago he would be satisfied with nothing but your blood, but I have persuaded him to look at the affair from another point of view."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. He was the aggressor and now acknowledges it. I bring from him a letter of apology for his ungentlemanly conduct in insulting you while you were a guest under his roof-tree. He now regrets his behavior. I told him that the lowest Arab of the desert would not so insult a man, after entertaining him in his tent and breaking bread with him."

So saying, he handed me a letter in the handwriting of Captain Mainwaring. It was short and to the point. I could find no fault with it.

"Very well, sir," I said; "let the matter rest where it is, I am satisfied."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Mr. Travers. You are a noble, generous-hearted young man. I esteem you highly, and wish we were better friends. Believe me, I feel the deepest sympathy for you in your recent terrible affliction."

I made no reply. Sighing heavily, he put his black-bordered handkerchief to his eyes,

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 159

and turned away his face. Consummate actor, his crocodile tears were assumed. His heart knew no pity. Even then he was conspiring against me, the villain! Seeing me standing rigid and gloomy before him, he murmured some unintelligible words, raised his crape-bound hat, and made me a sweeping bow.

"One moment before you go," I remarked, with cheeks hotly flushed and eyes burning.

He paused upon the threshold.

"Tell your friend to beware of me, and not cross my pathway. I know him as I know *you*—impostor and charlatan!"

"Charlatan?" he gasped.

"Ay, charlatan, Cagliostro! Manufacturer of the College of Memphian Mysteries, despoiler of the Egyptians as well as the Europeans! False heart——"

A look of the blackest rage and hate passed across his face like a storm cloud. Forked lightning seemed to flash from his greenish eyes. He clutched his hands convulsively, until the nails drew blood from his yellow palms. It was but a second; the storm was succeeded by the calm. The same fine mask of a face, imperturbable as that of the Sphinx. He made me a low obeisance, saying in a harsh, guttural voice:

"Mr. Travers, you act like a spoiled child who needs chastisement. But I forgive you for the nonce. One of these days we may meet again. Till then, adieu!"

In a moment he was gone. Once relieved of the man's hateful presence, a load seemed lifted from my heart; the sun shone brighter, the sky was clearer. I felt in my inmost soul that Ramadan was somehow the secret cause of all the misfortunes that had overwhelmed Wyndwood Hall. He was the Black Angel of Evil and Death whose shadowy, condor-like wings had "enveloped us with unutterable woe." He was the master of the puppet-booth whose hands had dangled us from cords, willy-nilly, like dolls of wood.

The days passed slowly by. I could not tear myself away from the vicinity of Wyndwood Hall and the mausoleum where my darling lay. God's chastening rod had fallen heavily upon me, but through His loving mercy I was to know peace and happiness once again. It was the Father's hand that led me through the dark Valley of the Shadow and enabled me to overcome my enemies. I became possessed of a strange fancy, the wildest, maddest thought that ever entered the brain of man. I hungered to look once more

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 161

upon the face of my beloved dead, ere I sailed away across the sea to my American home. It was to be a last adieu, until we should meet in Heaven. Once possessed of this obsession there was no overcoming it. My mortal senses shrank in horror from the deed, crying out: "Beware; it is sacrilege!" But my soul cried: "On, on; desist not!" I asked myself: "Am I indeed insane?" Possibly I was on the borderland of insanity for the time being. I determined to visit the mausoleum, penetrate into the vault, and tear open the sarcophagus that held the form of my departed one. One afternoon when on fire from brooding over this wild idea, I went to the village blacksmith and had him forge for me a small but strong crowbar, pointed at one end.

From a general merchandise shop I purchased a screw-driver, several chisels, and a wooden mallet. Then I wrote a note to Jennings, asking him to meet me that evening in the old garden of the Hall, and dispatched it by a stable boy at the inn. I commanded my messenger to give the missive into the butler's own hands. The boy returned in a little while, saying, "Mr. Jennings will comply with your request, sir."

162 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

Cautiously I picked my way through the park at dusk. The faithful butler met me at the appointed rendezvous.

"Jennings," I said to him, "I am going home to America in a day or two. Never again shall I set eyes upon Wyndwood Hall. You have proclaimed yourself my friend. Now do me one last favor—a strange one it may seem to you. Get me the keys to the mausoleum; the outer and inner doors."

The butler regarded me with amazement.

"Why, Mr. Travers, wh—wh——"

"Say no more, Jennings, but do my bidding. I simply wish to kiss the coffin that holds the remains of my darling. I must bid her one last adieu, ere I leave England. Don't refuse me, I beg of you!"

"Mr. Travers, you frighten me! What, go into that mausoleum at night?"

"Yes! For God's sake, man, grant my request! Get me the keys!" I clutched him by the arm with a grip of iron. He must have thought me mad.

"Well, well, master! I will do as you wish. I pray God no harm comes of it."

"No harm can come of it!" I said solemnly.

He left me, but was back in five minutes

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 163

with the keys, which were always kept in an escritoire in the library.

"Where are Captain Mainwaring and the Ramidans?" I asked.

"They are playing cards in the drawing-room. By the way, Mr. Travers, I have a bit of news for you. The Captain and M. and Mme. Ramadan are going abroad. The Captain has bought a steam yacht. The Hall is to be closed and left to the owls and bats. Mrs. Brandon and I are to accompany Colonel Moberley to Bath. The Colonel has been allowed a small annuity."

"When does the Captain set sail?" I inquired.

"In a week, I think," said Jennings.

Promising to return the keys at the earliest opportunity, I bade the good old servant *au revoir*, left the garden, and retired to my room. The hours passed slowly. It seemed to me as if midnight would never come. When the clock struck twelve I took my crowbar and other tools and placed them in a valise, together with several wax tapers and a box of matches. I quietly let myself out of the inn by the back entrance. A roundabout walk through the park brought me to the mausoleum of Wyndwood Hall. There was no

164 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

moon in the sky. The mausoleum looked strangely still. I opened the grated portal and let myself into the chapel. Locking the door carefully behind me, I lit one of my wax tapers and placed it on a faded *priedieu* in one corner of the apartment. Then I glanced about me. Upon a plain marble slab let into the wall was the following inscription in gold letters:

Sacred to the Memory
of
ISIDAURA MOBERLEY.

Then followed the dates of birth and death, and the Latin motto, *Requiescat in pace*.

With wildly throbbing heart I unlocked the massive iron door that led down into the vault. It grated harshly upon its rusty hinges like a soul in distress. A chilling blast from the sepulcher made my wax taper splutter, but I prevented the light from going out by shading it from the draught with my hand. I descended the flight of stone steps, and was in the last resting place of the Redcastles and Moberleys. The great leaden coffins were arranged in rows upon the floor of the vault.

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 165

I soon picked out the casket which bore the name of "Isidaura." With a terrible burst of grief I fell upon the leaden box and sobbed out the name of the woman I loved so well. The sepulcher rang with mocking echoes of my grief, but I felt no fear. I was mad! mad! Then I set feverishly to work to tear the lid from the casket. It was not such a difficult task, for I seemed to be gifted with superhuman strength. My crowbar was almost bent double, but I heeded it not. The lid of the outer casket once removed, I easily uncovered the second coffin, and threw back the sliding glass top at the head, expecting to be greeted with a sight that would move my soul with horror.

But—*the inner coffin was empty.*

A sudden light illumined my understanding! I laughed outright, wildly, insanely! I saw through the dark machinations of my enemies. *Isidaura was not dead!* The funeral, with its lights, plumes, and all the hideous trappings of mortality, had been a farce. The inscription upon the cenotaph was a lie.

"I thank Thee, O heavenly Father!" I cried, kneeling upon the cold slabs, "for having guided me to this place."

166 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

The greenish-black walls of the tomb seemed to melt away into the infinite. I beheld bright fields carpeted with lovely flowers, a superb phantasmagoria of the springtime of the year. I cried aloud in ecstasy: "Over those who dwelt in the shadow of death, a bright light has risen."

CHAPTER X

THE next morning I was confined to my bed with a nervous chill and fever. My joy over the discovery made in the mausoleum had come near prostrating me. I sent the keys back to Jennings with an urgent request that he visit me at the earliest opportunity. He returned word that he would be with me as soon as his work for the day was over; it was impossible to come sooner. I then wired to Frothingham and Mr. Oldfield to come at once to Stillwater, as I had matters of importance to communicate to them. The afternoon train brought Frothingham, but Mr. Oldfield was on a professional tour to the North of England and did not receive my telegram. I informed Frothingham of my adventure in the mausoleum, and asked his advice how to act on the discovery. His astonishment at the revelation knew no bounds. The mask of reserve dropped from his face. He sprang excitedly to his feet, exclaiming:

"A miracle! a miracle! I see in it the hand of God!"

Calming down somewhat, he seated himself. Pondering deeply, he said:

"Travers, we have the villains in our grasp at last, thanks to you. I was able to accomplish but little at the War Office, despite your affidavits, etc. Implicit trust is placed in Mainwaring. The authorities at the War Office laughed at me, and treated my story of Ramadan and the Mahdi with good-humored contempt. Evidently they took me for a madman. Talk about the 'wooden walls' of Old England—they're nothing compared with the 'wooden heads' of Downing Street. They wouldn't even consent to have Ramadan watched, and pooh-poohed me out of the Office. I left the place in high dudgeon. What did surprise them, however, was my knowledge of state secrets. They do suspect that someone tampered with the plans, etc., of the approaching Egyptian campaign, but not Mainwaring. I am disgusted with red-tape dunderheaded officialdom."

Our conversation was broken into by the arrival of Jennings. Twilight had fallen as he entered my sitting-room. A couple of

flickering candles placed upon a table feebly illuminated the dingy, unattractive place.

"Well, my good old friend," I said, giving him my hand, after the democratic manner of my country, "draw up a chair to the fire, take a glass of wine, and make yourself comfortable."

The butler, thanking me for my condescension, took a seat, but refused the wine. He bowed profoundly to Mr. Frothingham.

"Well, sir," he said, looking at me wistfully, "what can I do for you?"

"Compose yourself, Jennings," I replied. "I have a most extraordinary communication to make to you. Prepare yourself!"

The old man looked at me in alarm, as he clutched the arms of his chair.

"Jennings," I exclaimed solemnly, "*the grave has given up its dead!*"

"My God, Mr. Travers! What do you mean?" he gasped.

When I informed him of my discovery at the mausoleum, I thought he would have fallen from his seat in a swoon. Quickly pouring out a glass of wine, I made him drink it. He soon recovered from his astonishment, however, but his face remained deadly pale, and great beads of perspiration stood out

170 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

upon his wrinkled forehead. His hands quivered like aspen leaves.

"My dear, dear young mistress!" he cried, with wonderment. "Thank God you are alive!"

Then the old servant, who for many years had been so faithful and staunch to the house of Moberley, got down on his knees and offered up thanks to the Almighty Father for having in His wise providence preserved the life of Isidaura. It was a touching and beautiful sight to behold, bringing tears even to the eyes of Frothingham, whose face was always cold and impassive. I bowed my head in silent reverence, and then assisted Jennings to his feet.

"And now, young master," said Jennings, his manner quickly changing, "what are you going to do to rescue my lady? You must act soon, sir! Listen! Captain Mainwaring has evidently heard some bad news. He and the Ramidans started to pack their trunks this afternoon. The house is in confusion. They intend leaving the day after to-morrow."

"Ay, I thought as much," said Mr. Frothingham, lighting a fresh cigar. "The scoundrels meditate flight. That is as plain as a pikestaff. It seems we are just in time to

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 171

intercept their little game. It is too late to decoy them to London. We must meet them on their own ground; if necessary, face to face."

"Good!" I exclaimed, jumping to my feet and making for my cloak.

"Not so fast, young man," said the imperturbable Frothingham, catching me by the arm.

"Unhand me!" I cried, shaking loose from him.

In a second he had closed the door and placed his back against it.

"Frothingham," I exclaimed wildly, "you shall not treat me like a boy. Let me pass!"

"Oh, Mr. Travers, don't quarrel with your good friend," interposed Jennings. "He is acting for the best. Consider, sir, his age and experience."

This brought me to my senses.

"Pardon my madness!" I said to Frothingham. "I am wild, mad. Think what delay may mean. Think of my beloved Isidaura!"

"My poor boy, it is of Isidaura I am thinking. I tell you that I cannot answer for the safety of Miss Moberley if you act rashly in the matter. If you confront the villains with

172 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

the story of the empty coffin in the mausoleum, you might drive them to something desperate. Ramidan would scruple at nothing. By all the world Miss Moberley is adjudged dead. The fact that the casket in the sepulcher contains no occupant merely proves that the body is stolen, not that she is alive. They would laugh you to scorn."

"Then you have your doubts as to Isidaura being alive," I faltered, the horror of the thought taking full possession of me. I threw myself upon the bed, my head buried in my hands.

"Not at all!" replied Frothingham calmly. She is not *dead*. Why? *Because Ramidan loves her.*"

"What do you mean?" I shouted furiously, springing to my feet.

"Just what I say! I am not blind. The days I spent at Wyndwood Hall were not spent in vain. I studied that man like a book. Nothing escapes my vigilance. Had Captain Mainwaring really desired the death of his cousin by foul means (which I don't believe he ever did, or does), Ramidan would not have consented to the act. Why? Because, as I before remarked, he is in love with Miss Moberley."

"But his wife?"

"Tush, you don't suppose he loves *her*, eh?—that vulgar mountain of flesh? He tolerates her as a slave for the time being, that is all. She is useful to him. The plot is very clear to me. Ramidan, who is an adept in the drugs of the Orient, administered some strange and powerful potion to your betrothed, which produced in her a state bordering on catalepsy. The effect was gradually brought about. The body was placed in the coffin, but was afterward removed and resuscitated. I have known of such cases in the East, many of them self-induced, like the fakirs of India."

"It is terrible to think of Isidaura in the power of that scoundrel!" I exclaimed in a frenzy.

"She is safe as long as Mme. Ramidan is about. The wife is as jealous as a tiger of her husband."

"What is to be done?" I asked.

"We must resort to stratagem! To-morrow afternoon we will get Jennings to let us into the Hall secretly, and then we will ensconce ourselves in the laboratory."

"Why the laboratory?" I inquired.

"Because in that apartment above all

174 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

others we shall get the clue to the mystery—the 'Monk's Room'!"

"The 'Monk's Room'!" I echoed in amazement.

"Ay, the 'Monk's Room'! I firmly believe the legend of that hiding-place is founded upon fact. Ramidan in his prowlings about Wyndwood Hall stumbled upon the secret, and utilized it to further his hellish machinations. Everything points to the laboratory as the proper place to begin our search."

"And the 'Monk's Room' found?"

"We shall find Isidaura."

Mr. Frothingham then gave full directions to Jennings, who vowed to aid us to the best of his ability.

"I wish I were a younger man," he said. "I should like to throttle that false-hearted Captain. To think of him posing as the English gentleman and heir to Wyndwood Hall."

The butler returned to the Hall; Frothingham and I sat far into the night arranging our plan of campaign. My heart was buoyed up with a sweet hope. To clasp Isidaura once again in my arms would be bliss indeed, after all the horrors I had endured.

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 175

The next day dawned with weeping skies. The woods were sodden and dank. Late in the afternoon Frothingham and myself, wrapped in our waterproofs, took a long detour through the dripping woods, and came into the kitchen garden of the Hall, where we were met by Jennings. Both of us were armed and prepared for an encounter.

"Thank Heaven, sir, you have come!" said Jennings, as he clasped my hand.

"Where are Captain Mainwaring and the Ramidans?" I asked with considerable anxiety.

"The Captain has gone to Portcummis to look after his yacht, sir, and M. Ramidan——"

"His yacht?" I said, thunderstruck.

"Yes, sir! It arrived this morning from Southampton, and now lies anchored off Portcummis Light."

"Ah, you said nothing to me about a yacht," interrupted Mr. Frothingham, turning to me with an ominous look on his dark visage.

"No," I replied, "I had completely forgotten the fact that Mainwaring contemplated buying a steam yacht for a cruise in the Mediterranean. That such a purchase had

176 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

been consummated was beyond my knowledge."

"Hum!" said Mr. Frothingham musingly. Then turning sharply to Jennings he inquired: "Did the Captain go alone to Portcummis to-day?"

"Yes, sir," answered the butler. "Of that I am quite certain. I saw him off myself and placed his handbag in the dog-cart. The stable-boy, Welldon, drove. He is back, but without the Captain."

"Good!" grunted Frothingham. "No harm is done so far. One villain is off the scene. We only have to cope with the Ramidans, but they are formidable foes, I assure you. I was afraid that Miss Moberley had been carried to the boat, but since it has just arrived and no one has left the house except Mainwaring, we may conclude that the young lady is still at Wyndwood Hall. Lead the way, Jennings, to your private room; at dusk we will go to the laboratory."

"Where is Colonel Moberley?" I inquired.

"He is sick in bed," said Jennings, "but I secured the key to the laboratory while he was asleep. I found it in his room."

"You are a jewel, Jennings!" exclaimed

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 177

Frothingham, slapping the faithful servitor on the back. "You ought to be knighted."

"I tries to do my duty, sir," said Jennings.

We followed the butler into his private room—a dark little cabinet back of the pantry, where we were free from spying eyes. But we ran very little risk. The retinue of servants had all been dismissed from the Hall. Only Jennings, Mrs. Brandon, the housekeeper, the stable-boy Welldon, and the cook had been retained. In the butler's room we drank a glass of wine, which proved grateful after our long tramp through the damp woods.

As soon as night had enveloped the old house in its shadowy embrace, and all was quiet, Jennings introduced us into the octagon room, where he had built a fire in a brazier. Bidding him stand watch near the private carriage entrance of the Hall, and give us timely warning if the Ramidans attempted to leave the place, we lit the candles in the sconces fixed against the walls of the apartment and looked about us. The old laboratory presented a ghostly appearance in the flickering light of the tapers. I gazed about me, my brain teeming with thoughts of the hooded friar and of the dead and gone

178 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

Redcastle who had yielded up his life, a victim to the deadly fumes of his chemicals. Frothingham aroused me from my reverie by sounding upon the walls of the room with his walking stick, listening intently after each blow for some hollow reverberation which would indicate the existence of a secret door. His efforts, however, proved fruitless.

"The d——!" he hissed between his closed teeth; "these walls seem solid enough."

"Try the bookcase," I remarked, pointing to an old-fashioned armoire which had been fitted up as a receptacle for Colonel Moberley's alchemical folios. These great parchment-bound tomes had been part of the library of the former masters of Wyndwood Hall.

"An excellent idea," said Mr. Frothingham. I went to his assistance and helped him to remove the ponderous books from the armoire, that he might tap the wall behind it. The volumes were very heavy and no easy job to pile upon the floor. We were soon covered with dust and perspiring freely.

"Hist!" suddenly whispered Frothingham.

I listened, but heard nothing.

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 179

Tiptoeing to the portal, my companion quickly threw open the heavy oaken door. I thought I heard the faint rustle of a garment without. Frothingham darted out quickly into the dark gallery. Presently he returned, whispering, "I was mistaken! This old house is full of strange echoes."

He was in the act of closing the door when a draught of wind poured into the laboratory, extinguishing our lights. We were in semi-darkness.

With small reverence for the rare alchemical treatises of Nicholas Flamel, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus, I tore out a fly leaf from one of the books, twisted it into a sort of rough lighter which I lit from the brazier, and proceeded to ignite the candles. This accomplished, I threw the wisp of yellow paper upon the floor and stamped out the flame. I was still at my labor of removing books from the armoire when a tremendous exclamation from Frothingham greeted my ears. He was evidently laboring under the greatest excitement.

"Well," I said, turning to him.

"*Eureka!*" he cried.

"That means you have *found it!*" I said.

"Yes, thanks to this bit of paper from the

180 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

alchemical treatise of the famous Bombast of Hohenheim."

"What do you mean?" I asked, thinking him momentarily deranged.

He handed me the charred half of the fly-leaf with which I had relighted the tapers. It was spread out flat. I read aloud the following inscription, written in a large scrawling hand: "Sir Davenant Redcastle. His Boke, 1650." "Well," I said, holding out the paper to Frothingham, "I see nothing peculiar in that."

"Look closer," replied Frothingham.

Taking the paper up to one of the lights I examined it carefully. I saw traced in ink a curious design. Beneath the intricate diagram appeared some fine writing, the caption to which read as follows:

"A clue to ye Hidinge Place, known as ye Monk's Room. Set down by Davenant Redcastle, Knight Baronet, and Master of Wyndwood Hall, in ye year of our Crucified Lord and Saviour, 1650."

"Astounding," I exclaimed. "But there was no writing upon the paper when I tore it out of the book."

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 181

"True," responded the Anglo-Indian. "It was written in sympathetic ink, and consequently invisible. On coming in contact with heat, the inscription blazed into being like some ancient palimpsest upon a parchment."

"At last we have the clue!" I said. "Let us lose no time. Have you fully deciphered the text and plan?"

"Yes," said Frothingham. "It is as clear as crystal now."

Going over to the furnace, he stooped and carefully examined the projecting molding near the wall. Thrusting his hand into a small aperture, he gave a violent pull to a rod. With an all but noiseless sound the ponderous iron furnace rolled back from the wall, revealing a small, dark entrance in one side of the chimney. It was necessary to stoop low to enter this mysterious portal.

Snatching one of the candles from a sconce, I dashed into the secret door. Frothingham followed me closely. My heart beat wildly. At last I was to behold Isidaura, to clasp her in my arms.

"Caution!" whispered Frothingham. "And not so fast, or you will spoil all. The directions are—straight ahead for fifty feet,

182 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

then ascend some stone steps; turn to your right and traverse a winding passage until you reach a second flight of steps leading to the Monk's Room, which is located among the central stack of chimneys of the Hall."

I followed his directions to the letter, and being the more active of the two, soon out-distanced him. Once or twice I stumbled, but quickly regaining my feet, plunged forward again, holding the wax taper above my head. The musty, damp smell of the walls made me feel sick and faint. Finally I arrived at the second flight of stairs. They were precipitous and seemed to wind about the chimneys of the old house. I paused a moment before ascending these steps to catch my breath. I heard Frothingham picking his way along the narrow passage. I then climbed the stairs. The glare from my taper threw exaggerated silhouettes upon the wall. Just as I rounded a sudden turn of the steps, there came a blinding flash of light, a loud report, and a pistol ball grazed my temple. The candle fell from my hand. A startled cry broke from me as I staggered and leaned against the wall. A thin stream of blood trickled down my cheek. Then an exultant laugh greeted my ear. Looking up, I saw the hateful figure of Rami-

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 183

dan standing upon a narrow ledge above me. In one hand he held a lantern, in the other a smoking revolver. Before I had time to draw my own weapon, he disappeared through a door and was gone.

At this juncture Mr. Frothingham appeared on the scene, with a candle in his hand.

"Ramidan!" was all I could say, in my bewilderment.

"My dear Travers, you are wounded," said Frothingham, anxiously. "I heard the shot and hastened to your aid."

"My wound is merely a superficial one," I replied, "merely a scratch of the skin. It is nothing! Let us on!"

Together we sprang up the stairs and threw ourselves against a heavy oaken door. It stoutly resisted our combined efforts. Frothingham then took his pistol, placed the muzzle in the keyhole of the door, and fired. The lock was shattered in an instant, and we entered the apartment. It was the "Monk's Room"—the famous hiding place of the persecuted priests during the days of good Queen Bess. (Was she so very good?) Cunningly was it contrived. It was feebly lighted during the daytime by a small loophole in the wall.

184 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

The room contained a bed, a table, and several chairs. About the place were scattered articles of female apparel; the bed was still warm, having recently been slept upon.

"Isidaura! Isidaura!" I cried, searching in vain for her.

The walls gave back the echoing cry.

"He has carried her off with him through this sliding panel," said Frothingham, examining the wall near the couch.

"Quick! quick!" I shouted, "let us after them!"

We endeavored to burst in the panel, but it was securely locked by a secret spring and heavy bars on the outside, the latter having been placed there by Ramidan, the better to secure his victim. This I subsequently learned. Our efforts were ineffectual.

"This aperture leads to the tapestried chamber—Prince Rupert's Room," said Frothingham, consulting his chart. "But come, we have no time to lose. Let us beat a hasty retreat the way we came, and intercept the villain before he has time to leave the house."

I thought of the old butler, Jennings, on guard at the front door of the Hall. Would

he be able to cope with the Ramidans? I feared not.

Back we rushed to the laboratory, and from thence to the entrance hall of the house, where we were met by the housekeeper, Mrs. Brandon, who looked frightened to death.

"The Ramidans! Isidaura!" I asked, catching her violently by the arm.

"Gone! gone!" she wailed.

"What do you mean?" I gasped.

"They have carried her off! Alas, my poor young mistress! To think of her alive all this time and concealed in Wyndwood Hall without my knowledge. What will become of her!"

"This is no time for useless bewailing," I cried. "We must follow them. They cannot have gotten far away. Have horses saddled immediately."

"There are no horses left in the stables," she answered wildly. The Ramidans went off in the family coach, bag and baggage. They were aided by the stable-boy, who is in their pay. I saw them as they whirled down the avenue. Baba was on the box with Well-don. Mme. Ramidan and my mistress were inside. Ramidan rode Mr. Mainwaring's 'Black Bess.'"

"Where is Jennings?" I asked.

"Poor man, he did his best to stop the coach, but was overpowered by the scoundrel Ramidan, who struck him a severe blow over the head with a heavy riding whip. He is in the library on a couch, where I have bound up his wound. He lay for some minutes unconscious upon the terrace before he was able to stagger into the house."

Faithful old man, he had done his best to save Isidaura, but, alas, was too feeble to render any real service. His warning cries were not heard by us when we were in the secret room. The sound was deadened by the thick walls.

I went into the library with Frothingham and spoke a cheering word to Jennings. After that we went out upon the terrace.

"What is to be done?" I asked.

"Let us to the village and secure horses. It is our only chance," answered Frothingham. "Ramidan is evidently making for the yacht."

"What was the reason of his sudden flight? How did he find out that we were in the house?"

"Babal" was the laconic reply of the Anglo-Indian, who frowned gloomily.

"Baba?"

"Yes, the Arabian servant. I am confident he spied upon us and informed his master. What brought him to the laboratory I know not. Do you not recall the noise heard in the hall, and my rushing out of the room to see who was there. It could not possibly have been Ramadan or his elephantine spouse. They could not have retreated with such expedition. But what puzzles me is how did Ramadan become acquainted with the secret of the Monk's Room?"

"It is indeed a mystery," I said. "Furthermore, he must have located a secret postern door leading into Wyndwood Hall. Otherwise there is no explaining his mysterious comings and goings."

We spent no more time in idle discussion, but set out for the village, running most of the way. The Moberley Arms once reached, we had no difficulty in procuring horses, though precious minutes were wasted in arousing the sleeping landlord and hostlers. The host of the inn would have interrogated us concerning our journey, but we did not stop to enlighten him. Springing into the saddles, we were off like bolts shot from a cross-bow. A furious storm of rain and wind had set in.

188 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

The sleet cut our faces like knives, but we galloped on, following the sandy road which led over the lonely moorland. The black clouds scurried after us like witches *en route* to a mad *sabbat* in some haunted churchyard.

We had nearly reached the fishing village of Portcummis when at an angle of the road a dark mass loomed up in front of us. We reined in our frightened steeds with difficulty. Dismounting and throwing the bridle of his horse about the limb of a tree on one side of the road, Frothingham cautiously advanced toward the object. Presently he called to me:

"It is the carriage from the Hall overturned. One of the axles is broken. The trunks are in the ditch. The Ramidans and Miss Moberley cannot be far off. This is a most fortunate occurrence for us, because it has delayed the flight. Let us after them quickly."

We rode on. At a little distance we discovered the coach horses shivering under an old tree. They had broken their traces and run away after the accident. In a short time we were clattering over the flinty stones of the main street of Portcummis. At the end

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 189

of the long mole which reached out into the sea we descried a group of fishermen. Some of them carried lanterns. Throwing the reins of our horses to a ragged boy to hold, we dashed out upon the mole. The waves seemed to be running mountain high, dashing clouds of spray over the fishermen assembled on the pier. Just as we arrived at the end of the stone embankment a boat pushed off, aided by the efforts of the fisher folk and the lusty oarsmanship of a crew of swarthy Lascars. I beheld in the frail craft my beloved Isidaura swathed in waterproofs. Holding her about the waist was the repulsive-looking Mme. Ramidan. Ramidan sat in the bow, a black and gloomy figure against the seething water. Captain Godfrey Mainwaring half stood in the stern of the boat, shouting directions to the crew.

I would have plunged into the water and attempted to swim after them, had I not been restrained by Frothingham and some of the fishermen.

"Isidaura! Isidaura!" I screamed in agony.

She heard my voice. Wildly she rose to her feet and looked in my direction. A flash from the slowly revolving lantern of the

190 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

lighthouse on the promontory to the right of the harbor illumined the scene.

"Henry! Henry!" she cried in the accents of despair.

Mme. Ramidan, affrighted, grasped the slender form of the girl and pulled her back. Captain Mainwaring's blasphemous curses could be heard above the roar of the blast that had set in at that moment with renewed violence. Turning, he shook his clenched fist at me. His haggard face was distorted with rage. He seemed oblivious of the danger he incurred. The boat careened, shipping considerable water. It labored wildly in a trough of the sea. Mainwaring lost his balance and was precipitated overboard. Frantic were his struggles to regain the boat, but the waves dashed him away and engulfed him. He might have been saved had Ramidan made one supreme effort in his behalf. But that the Egyptian did not do. Perhaps it was a part of his policy to rid himself of his accomplice at the first favorable opportunity, and took this occasion of so doing, for he gave orders to the Lascars in an unknown tongue, and they bent to their oars with a will. The boat was righted and steered for the yacht, which lay within hailing dis-

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 191

tance of the mole. It seemed hours before the small craft reached its destination in that tumultuous sea. But it succeeded in so doing, and its passengers and rowers were safely, though with difficulty, lifted to the deck of the vessel. The yacht then, with full steam on and sails flying, disappeared into the blackness of the night, leaving me upon the pier a crushed and heart-broken man. I had found Isidaura only to lose her again. I might have rescued her had I succeeded in procuring a fishing boat in which to overtake the row-boat of the yacht, but none was procurable for love or money. The fishermen would not be bribed to risk themselves and crafts in such an adventure.

Frothingham, good fellow and true friend, succeeded in arousing me from my lethargy. We went to London, reported the case to the authorities, and cablegrams were sent flying everywhere to English Consuls at foreign ports to take steps to intercept Ramidan. Without waiting to hear the results, I packed up a few belongings and started for Cairo, Egypt, leaving my address with Frothingham, in case anything should turn up in my absence. I had an intuition that I would come upon the track of the fugitives in Egypt.

Where would he be more likely to go, now that the war was on? I vowed to devote my life to hunting him down, even to the uttermost ends of the earth. Nothing should balk my vengeance. I shuddered when I thought of Isidaura in his power.

I shall pass over the details of my journey to the East. In due time I was in Cairo, and established at Shepherd's Hotel. The quaint old city of the Sultans was crowded with English soldiers. Lord Wolseley, I learned, was at Wady Halfa with the vanguard of the army that was to march to the relief of Khartoum. I spent a week or more seeking for some traces of the Ramidans, but, alas! my researches were not rewarded with success. Finally I received a cablegram from Frothingham, informing me that the yacht in which the Ramidans and Isidaura had sailed had touched at a Syrian port, and landed its passengers secretly during the night, but there all traces of them had been lost. I felt certain that the Egyptian would not remain in Syria, but would make his way to Egypt, but just where—ah! that was the problem. The ancient land of the Pharaohs, I argued, was the loadstone that had the power to attract a follower of the Mahdi. I was not in Cairo

many days after the receipt of the cablegram ere I was joined by the ubiquitous Frothingham. Indefatigable in his pursuit of excitement and adventure, he had obtained a position as war correspondent for a prominent London journal, and was preparing to join the army for the Soudan campaign. He brought me one piece of news: Godfrey Mainwaring's body had been picked up on the beach at Portcummis the morning after the sailing of the yacht. It was torn and bruised almost beyond recognition, having been tossed about among the jagged rocks of the "Jaws of Death."

I debated long with Frothingham as to my future plans. Finally he persuaded me to undertake the campaign in the Soudan, whispering in my ear: "Perhaps we shall come across Ramadan at Khartoum. Who knows?"

That decided me. Frothingham obtained a post for me as his assistant. My facility for sketching proved a successful bait with the newspaper people in getting me my place.

BOOK IV

**IN WHICH THE SPHINX SLEEPS
FOREVER**

*" Give me thy hand, dear one, though unto
pain
I crush it to be sure that this be dream,
Knowing 'twas Death that passed, and oh,
how near!"*

—ROBT. UNDERWOOD JOHNSON.

CHAPTER XI

OUR preparations for the Soudan expedition were soon made. Frothingham's letters of introduction and recommendation to high officials at Cairo smoothed matters for us considerably. One hot, dusty morning we left Boulak and proceeded by rail to Assiout, and from thence to Assouan by water. From Assouan we journeyed by rail to Philae, where we spent an afternoon and night. This delay was unavoidable, owing to the difficulty we experienced in procuring a dahabeyah to carry us to Korti, the regular passenger steamers being crowded with soldiers and military stores on the way to the front. Almost everything that would float on the Nile had been preëmpted by the Government for transport service. We were lucky indeed to secure a sailing boat large enough to carry a crew, two passengers, a black servant, and three scrawny, hungry-looking camels, to say nothing of provender and baggage.

I had visited Egypt once before in my life,

198 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

spending my time principally in Cairo, visiting the famous pyramids of Gizeh and the colossal Sphinx, but never had I ascended the Nile so far as the first cataract. Philae was a revelation of beauty to me, as it is to all lovers of the romantic; Philae, the little island in the Nile, sacred of old as the burial place of Osiris, god of gods; the location of some splendid old ruined temples, whose ponderous pylons and great columns, painted with hieroglyphics, still rear their heads to the blue Egyptian sky. At Philae, in the ancient days, the Mysteries were celebrated. Pilgrims flocked thither to participate in them. It is an interesting fact to note that the sacred rites of Isis and Osiris had their last stronghold at Philae. There the hierophants made a long and successful stand against the encroachments of the Christian religion. Finally there came a special edict from Constantinople, from the Emperor Theodosius, abolishing the pagan worship at Philae. The temples were pulled down, the sacred shrines were violated, and thus ended those Mysteries that were the admiration of the ancient world. About the ruins of Philae there grew up a little circle of mud huts, inhabited by monks, whose contempt for the old faith of

the Pharaohs was manifested in acts of useless vandalism. But the day came when the cross disappeared from Egypt, the Moslem hordes poured into the land, and settled like a cloud of locusts upon everything. Philae was deserted, and left to undisturbed repose. When night, with its blue-black canopy, studded with brilliant stars, has fallen upon the world of the Orient, these ancient ruins seem to breathe forth mystery like the earth exhales moisture. The silvery moon, sacred disk of Isis, floods the faces of the colossi, images of the gods, and intensifies their grotesque shadows. In this solemn hour of slumber and silence a weird phantasmagoria presents itself to our entranced vision. We behold the ruins restored, as if by magic; pylon and pillar, obelisk and avenue of sphinxes, all are intact, as of old. Within the sacred enclosure—the *sanctum sanctorum*—we can hear the chant of the hierophants. The candidate for the Mysteries presents himself at the bronze doors that lie dark and fast-sealed between the twin towers of the tall propylon. Carved above the portal is the winged disk, emblem of the sun and of eternal life.

“Seek and ye shall find! Knock and it shall be opened unto you!”

Suddenly the bronze doors swing back with a noise like thunder; the trembling neophyte enters into the gloomy temple. Behind him close the doors with a hollow clang. The moon passes behind a cloud, there gradually comes a faint light in the east; the dawn is breaking—the young god Horus is making ready to sail the heaven in his mystic bark. The desert dream is at an end; the huge temple lies once more in fragments, the shadow-haunted home of owl and bat. Upon the bank of the river a solitary crane stands, brooding upon the desolate scene. The utter loneliness of the place depresses the heart. We realize to its fullest extent the vanity of earthly hopes. Where are the priests and initiates, and the myriad souls that lived, loved, and died so many centuries ago? Are they still wandering through the shadowy realms of Amenti, or have they found the blissful "Pools of Peace" in the kingdom of the divine Osiris? Ah, who can tell! But this one fact we know—they have vanished like dreams.

From Philae we set sail for Korti, arriving there on January 4, in time for a great review of the English army by Lord Wolseley. Here we learned the plans of the Commander-in-

Chief. General Sir Herbert Stewart, with a strong column, was to march across the desert to Metamna to secure the shortest passage to Khartoum, and at the same time hold the wells at Gakdul and Abu-klea, while a second column was to take the Nile route. If all went well, the two forces would concentrate at Metamna and hurl themselves like a thunderbolt upon Khartoum. No time was to be lost. A messenger had arrived from Gordon on December 30 telling of the fearful straits of the garrison at Khartoum.

On January 8 Sir Herbert Stewart set out for Gakdul. It was a picturesque and inspiring sight, that desert march. It had something of the mysterious about it. The dust rose in clouds and enveloped the gallant little army in a sort of golden haze, like the diaphanous drapery of an ancient Egyptian princess. The camels, upon which were mounted specially trained men, moved in long, heavy columns. The lumbering beasts, true "ships of the desert," stretched out their lean, scraggy necks like ostriches. The bayonets of the soldiery gleamed in the fierce sunlight like molten steel. In the rear were the correspondents, some mounted upon camels, others upon horses. The bugles blared, and the

blood-red banner of St. George waved proudly in the air. On the 12th we arrived at the wells of Gakdul, where an English advance force of four hundred men occupied an entrenched camp. Here we heard rumors of the enemy. Major Kitchener (now Lord Kitchener of Khartoum) had intercepted a convoy of dates going to the Mahdi. His scouts also reported the appearance of one or two small parties of marauding natives. After the water-skins were filled and the camels grazed, we started on our journey into the heart of the desert. Our force was composed as follows: Three troops 19th Hussars; First Division Naval Brigade, with one Gardner gun; half battery of Royal Artillery; Heavy Camel Regiment; Mounted Infantry Camel Regiment; 100th Sussex Regiment; transport and medical corps, making in all about 1500 men and 2300 camels. Three days of marching and bivouacking; the sun beat pitilessly down; many of the camels died, and we left their carcasses to rot and their bones to bleach upon the sand. On January 16 reveillé was sounded at 3.30 A.M. It was quite dark when the column got into motion, and some confusion was caused. When daylight dawned we could see about us

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 203

a vast, flat stretch of country. At one o'clock the scouts in advance sent back word that the enemy's cavalry were in front.

"Halt!" was the stern command.

We were at the end of a long plain. Before us rose mountains, black and precipitous. The coveted wells of Abu-klea were located in the midst of these forbidding masses of rock. We formed up and advanced in line of camels out of the plain into the pass. Detached bodies of the Mahdi's soldiers appeared on the ridges as we ascended. A halt was called at 3 P. M. Our commander, finding the enemy in a strong position across the pass, decided to postpone an engagement for that day, and ordered his gallant little army to form a zereba for the night. We went to work with a will to fortify our positions, using stones, packing cases, ammunition boxes, etc., for the purpose. Frothingham and I rode out to one of the advanced pickets just before twilight, where we had a good view of the enemy. They occupied a large camp about two miles ahead. A long line of green banners and flags marked their chief position. The beating of tom-toms and the clashing of cymbals, with other barbaric cacophony, could be distinctly heard. They

were evidently making preparations for battle, possibly intending to attack us that very night.

I thought to myself: "Shall we not be surrounded and cut to pieces by yonder horde of savages? Can escape be possible? Shall any of us live to tell the tale?"

The twilight deepened. Myriads of stars came out beautiful and bright, like lamps swinging from the vast dome of a temple. Many of the tired soldiers slept, others wrote in their diaries and whispered to each other thoughts of loved ones so far away in England. The guards kept faithfully to their posts, straining their eyes for signs of an approaching foe. Every clump of dried grass, every rock, was a suspicious object.

"If I fall," I said to Frothingham, "you will know what to do. My letters, my watch, and Masonic ring send to my parents. If you should ever meet Isidaura again in this world tell her that I died with her name on my lips."

"I will carry out your instructions, dear friend," said he, with quivering lips. "But let us hope that nothing so disastrous will occur."

"And you?" I asked.

"Ah, if I should be laid low," he said thoughtfully, "and you survive, take what I have about me as souvenirs of a good friend. I have no living relations. I made my will in England before I left. You and Isidaura are my heirs."

Dear fellow! I grasped him by the hand, but could say nothing, my heart was too full.

The night passed without important incident. We were not attacked by our foe.

After a hasty breakfast we received orders to form square preparatory to an advance. Some of the Sussex Regiment and all of the baggage guards were left behind to defend the zereba, while the 19th Hussars were to operate on our left. Clouds of skirmishers were thrown out to the right and left, who drew the fire of the enemy and diverted it considerably from the square, which moved steadily forward, but at a slow march. Occasionally a man or camel was hit. We took care to keep on open, rocky ground; to the left was the "waddy" or gully. The hills on either side of us fairly swarmed with Arab sharpshooters and spearmen. On nearing the line of flags we sent a number of shells right among them, which caused hundreds of concealed foemen to scatter into wild flight.

Some of our men thought that the main body of the enemy had retired to the hills, leaving us in full possession of the ground, but they soon realized their mistake. We had not advanced very far when up rose a line of redoubtable spearmen all across the waddy. The place seemed black with them. Their appearance was as if by magic, so well had they been concealed. There were upward of five thousand of these Arab warriors, who advanced upon us, led by Emirs on horseback. It was a veritable avalanche of humanity that threatened to overwhelm us by its very momentum. Never had I beheld a grander sight. The green banners floated in the breeze, the spearheads scintillated like sparks from a furnace, the white and red bournouses fluttered like wings in the air, the richly caparisoned horses reared and plunged.

One remarkable incident of this furious onslaught of the Mahdi's army was an aged, white-bearded Emir, who rode to his death calmly reading passages from the Koran, which he held in his left hand, his right hand guiding his noble Arabian steed. Was there ever such splendid fanaticism, such heroic nonchalance? It was a spectacle for the gods—the gods of the dead Pharaohs. The

charge was directed against the left corner of the square. Our skirmishers quickly fell back upon the approach of this formidable host. The mounted infantry opened fire upon the Arabs, "causing them to sheer off the main attack toward the left rear corner, where was the Heavy Camel Regiment." Here the greatest confusion prevailed, owing to the plunging of the frightened camels and the efforts of their riders to prevent a stampede. At the most critical moment the Gardner gun, under the command of Sir Charles Beresford, jammed after firing two or three rounds and became useless. The furious mass of Arabs was driven like a wedge against the corner of the square, which gave way. I saw the gallant Colonel Fred Burnaby go down, covered with wounds. A number of the Arabs penetrated within the square and began stabbing the camels and slashing about with their sharp assegais. I was in the midst of the *mêlée*. Drawing my pistol, I prepared to defend myself and render all possible assistance to my comrades. A tall Arab, in a flowing red bournous embroidered with silver, led the onslaught of the Moslems. In his left hand he held aloft the banner of the Mahdi, which hung in tattered pieces from its pole,

in his right hand he waved a glittering Damascus blade. Every time that weapon fell an English life went out. The man seemed to possess a charmed life. Bullets passed through his bournous, but left him unscathed. An intrepid sailor, one of the servers of the Gardner gun, attacked him with a sword bayonet and endeavored to wrest from him the green banner. It was a gigantic struggle for the mastery. He wounded the sailor and would have dispatched him had I not intervened and diverted his sanguinary rage from his prey to myself. Twice I discharged my revolver at him, but missed him; the third time my weapon did not go off; it had become clogged with fine sand. Warding off a blow of his scimitar with my heavy riding whip, I closed with him, catching him by the sword arm and thereby preventing him from passing the blade through my body. His turban, with its long flowing streamers, fell from his head, and I beheld the face of Ramidan—the Sphinx of Wyndwood Hall, the Egyptian charlatan, and my deadliest foe, he whom I had come in search of. The meeting was providential. His surprise was as great as my own. A great abyss lay between the long drawing-room of Wyndwood Hall and the

lonely desert in upper Egypt. Ramidan's face wore an expression of the blackest hate. His eyes fairly flashed fire. If he could have annihilated me with a look he would have done so.

"At last!" he hissed.

"At last!" I answered.

He tossed his unkempt mane like a lion at bay.

"Yield!" I cried. I did not wish him harmed, for upon him depended my obtaining a clue to the whereabouts of Isidaura. "Yield! you are surrounded by your enemies. I promise you quarter."

"Yield to *you*?" he hoarsely replied. "Never! I shall kill you! I hate! hate! hate you! Long have I waited for this hour; Allah has delivered you into my hands! I may die, but you shall go with me."

We wrestled together for several minutes. The dust and smoke enveloped us in a great cloud. My strength was nothing compared with his. Gradually he forced me back upon an ammunition chest, where I writhed impotently. My right arm was twisted and broken in the scuffle. I was at his mercy. His powerful hand gripped my throat like an iron vise. The blood spurted from my nose and

mouth. All was black before me. In a minute I would have been strangled to death. His voice rang in my ear like a ponderous iron bell heard from some great sea depth: "I hate thee! I send thee to the nethermost hell! May the fiends seize thy soul in endless torments." Just as I was about losing consciousness there came a report of a pistol close by. Ramidan released his hold upon my throat and staggered to his feet. He tottered for a moment like a tree under the woodman's ax, and then fell upon his face in the sand, clutching the rank grass convulsively with his hands. A ball had passed through his body.

"Thank God, you are saved!" I heard a voice cry. It was Frothingham who had come so opportunely to my aid. He had saved my life, as he had saved it once before on the pier at Portcummis.

"You are not much hurt?" he inquired anxiously as he sat down by my side, lifting my head upon his lap and giving me a drink of water from his canteen.

I gasped for breath like a half-drowned man who had been recently pulled from the water. In a little while I was able to sit up, but I gave a great cry of pain when I

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 211

attempted to rise. My arm hurt me severely. Frothingham placed me against some baggage and gave me a glass of brandy. I felt better.

"Ramidan!" I cried, pointing to the writhing form at a little distance from us.

"Ramidan!" ejaculated my friend. "What do you mean?"

"He lies there!" I said.

Frothingham, greatly astonished, pushed the body of the charlatan over upon its back. The Egyptian had been shot through the right lung and was dying from an internal hemorrhage. I crawled slowly to him.

"Ramidan!" I whispered in his ear.

He opened his bloodshot eyes and gave me a terrible look.

"For God's sake, Ramidan," I implored, "tell me of Isidaura! Where is she?"

Frothingham lifted up the dying man's head and wiped the bloody froth from his lips, the better that he might make answer to me.

"You—you—shall never know!" gasped the Egyptian. "She is lost—lost to you for evermore—ay, lost! lost!"

With a look of unutterable hatred on his ghastly face he fell back and expired.

212 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

Thus was ended a remarkable life—a life fraught with evil. But he died true to the faith of Islam, the religion of the sword; a martyr to the cause of the Mahdi.

The square was soon clear of the remaining Arabs, who were literally cut to pieces. The battle was won for England.

The dead were interred where they lay. The last sight I had of that sanguinary plain of Abu-klea, as I was carried off the field with the rest of the wounded, was Ramidan's grave—a little mound of sand in the lonely desert. Upon it was perched a number of vultures—those hideous ghouls of the battlefield.

The remainder of the campaign is of no interest to this chronicle. I was taken to Korti, and there spent many weary days in the hospital. Frothingham went ahead with the army. Khartoum was not relieved. Gordon, the modern Paladin, the true knight errant, *sans peur et sans reproche*, was slain at his post.

When I recovered from my hurt and a slow fever which had been engendered by the hardships of the desert march, I went to Cairo, where I spent months vainly searching for Mme. Ramidan and Isidaura, hoping

against hope that they might after all be concealed in that city. As to getting to Khartoum, it was out of the question—at that time. I traveled through Syria. Heartsick, I set sail for England to settle some urgent business affairs, intending eventually to return to Egypt and spend a lifetime, if necessary, in the quest of my beloved Isidaura.

CHAPTER XII

I WAS back again at Wyndwood Hall, in the seventeenth century garden. The ancient Elizabethan ghost-house was falling to ruins. Colonel Moberley was dead and in his grave. The servants were gone. It was the autumn of the year; the leaves, withered and brown, were falling as of old about the deserted mansion. The bronze Sphinx slumbered. The rays of the setting sun fell upon the stained-glass windows of the armory, making them flame with all the colors of a painter's palette. The rooks that inhabited the giant oaks of the park were returning home to their habitations with a great fluttering of dusky wings and melancholy croaking. I leaned against the ancient dial and gave myself up to thoughts of by-gone days. And still the leaves fell about me, some of them brushing my cheek in a startling, half-human kind of way. The perfect lines of Rossetti's "Blessed Damozel" recurred to my memory:

THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX 215

“ . . . Yet now, and in this place,
Surely she leaned o'er me—her hair
Fell all about my face . . .
Nothing: the autumn fall of leaves.
The whole year sets apace.”

Yes! it was to be a long farewell to Wyndwood Hall, to all my hopes and dreams of happiness. My heart seemed as if burned out, and ashes.

“Isidaura! Isidaura!” I cried aloud in anguish. “You are lost to me forever! Adieu! Adieu!”

Then came to me the old sweet sensation of a mystic presence; the dim prescience of a blessed vision soon to be unfolded. There was a faint rustle of dried leaves upon the earth. I said to myself, with beating heart, “It is but the stirring of a bird.” I turned—and there stood Isidaura, stepped from out of that beloved past, the memory of which had caused me such bitter pain for so many weary months. She was dressed all in black, her face was pale and wan, but still beautiful, with an ethereal loveliness that savored more of the angels of Heaven than of this world. Her blond hair was enveloped in the golden glory of the dying rays of the sun. She held out her arms to me.

"Henry!"

"My dearest love!" I cried in ecstasy. "Tell me that you are no vision—that you live, live!"

"It is even I, and in the flesh, Henry."

I caught her trembling form in my arms, while her tears fell silently.

"Never to part again in this world," she murmured softly.

"Never again!" I replied.

"Thank God for that!" she whispered, as she nestled in my arms, as soft and as light as a dove.

"And now, my darling," I said, "tell me how it was you came here. Tell me all."

Then fell a shadow athwart us. Mme. Ramidan, looking old and broken, with her earthy-colored face all seamed with wrinkles, hobbled forward from behind a tree.

"Mme. Ramidan!" I ejaculated, withdrawing from her in disgust.

"Yes, Mme. Ramidan," she responded feebly. "I ask your forgiveness, Mr. Travers, for the wrong I have done you and yours. Don't shrink from me. I have been a wicked woman, but not wholly bad. Never forget that I watched over and protected your betrothed. My husband loved her, but I saved

her from him. As soon as I learned of his death at the battle of Abu-klea I brought Isidaura to England, to give her back to you. She has been very ill, sir; I have nursed her faithfully, devotedly."

"It is true, Henry," said Isidaura.

"I shall go away now and never molest you again," continued Mme. Ramidan. "Oh, say that you pardon me!" She broke down utterly and wept bitter tears of remorse.

"With all my heart," I cried. "You protected Isidaura from harm, and are deserving of my sympathy. If you need money at any time, call upon me."

"Thank you," she said. "I am amply provided for. Good-by, Mr. Travers! Good-by, Isidaura!"

She started to leave, but returning, humbly said:

"May I, Isidaura—Miss Moberley—kiss you before I go? I have grown to love you as a daughter."

Isidaura assented, whereupon Mme. Ramidan imprinted a kiss upon her forehead. Then she went away, out of our lives forever.

From Isidaura I learned the full particulars of the flight from Wyndwood Hall. The yacht landed at an obscure port in Syria.

218 THE HOUSE OF THE SPHINX

After leaving his wife and Isidaura in the hands of some co-religionists in the interior of the country, Ramadan departed for Egypt to join the Mahdi's army. On learning of the death of her husband, Mme. Ramadan went first to Cairo with Isidaura, and thence to England, having ascertained that I had set sail for that country. Isidaura was unaware of the fact of her premature burial and resurrection. All she remembered was awakening from a hideous dream and finding herself a prisoner in the Monk's Room.

Her only attendant was Mme. Ramadan. Ramadan never came near her unless accompanied by his wife. The tigerish jealousy of the Russian woman saw to that. Had he survived the battle of Abu-klea and joined his wife in Syria, there is no telling what would have occurred. Mme. Ramadan, in my opinion, had escaped death from poisoning. So great was the spell the Egyptian exercised over his spouse that she did his bidding like a dog, but her womanhood she asserted when her jealousy was aroused over Isidaura. I never informed Isidaura of the story of the funeral and the mausoleum. To this day she has no inkling of it. She has too delicately an organized nervous system to admit

being told the truth. It might have a serious effect upon her health, mentally as well as physically.

Isidaura and I were quietly married in Paris, at the Protestant Episcopal Church. Mr. Frothingham acted as best man. After disposing of the English property, I set sail with my wife for that new world which is the old—America!

Our married life has been peaceful and happy; and our dear children grow dearer to us every day. There is little Isidaura, with her mother's spirituelle face and contemplative mind—a true daughter of Isis; and there is Henry, dark like myself, and devoted to his mother. Jennings, the old butler of Wyndwood Hall, is with us, as faithful as ever. Once a year the children receive a present from their godfather, Frothingham, who still roams the unfrequented places of the earth, a restless soul.

And so endeth the strange story of the House of the Sphinx.





